

**School of English Literatures and Philosophy**

**Faculty of Arts**

**Women's Identities and Resistance  
in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast*  
and Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo***

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**This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the award of the Degree  
of Masters by Research  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

I, Ida Puspita, declare that this thesis, submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Masters by Research, in the School of English Literature and Philosophy, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledge. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other institution.

Ida Puspita

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis compares representation and resistance of Javanese and Aboriginal women depicted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* and Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*. The thesis argues that colonisation in patriarchal Indonesia and Australia intensifies women's subordination. While there is a huge difference between the colonial histories of these countries as well as between the cultures of Javanese and Aborigines, patriarchal and colonial experiences resonate quite similarly. The thesis shows how two dissimilar contexts can be brought into dialogue by applying a feminist-postcolonial theoretical frame to both novels. General concepts of identity, resistance, and subalternity are employed to investigate how female characters deal with identity construction and subjugation in these patriarchal colonial systems. In the novels commoner and Aborigine become almost, but not quite 'members' of the dominant group. Yet, no matter how thoroughly they are immersed and 'expert' in what is expected of them, they will always be considered second class. The thesis shows that at some points, the main female characters show compliance but in their own particular ways they also challenge this domination. The resistance of the Girl toward upper-class' values is stronger than Coonardoo's toward the white values. Pramoedya writes about Javanese women as a Javanese, yet Prichard's white background limits her ability to champion the Aboriginal cause and to depict a resistant character.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is particularly aimed at revealing that colonisation in Indonesia and Australia intensifies women's subordination. This study harnesses postcolonial and feminist critical theories to analyse women's identity formation and resistance in the novels of two prominent authors, Indonesian Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (he is typically referred to by his first name) and Australian Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*. Both texts deal with cultural clash that results from patriarchal and colonial practices, and in each work both authors depict how women negotiate with this double subjugation. Neither the authors nor their narratives can ever be separated from the historical and social backgrounds of where they came from. So, by bringing together these two differently located literary texts together, the nature of identity and resistance in each case can be identified and evaluated.

Indonesia and Australia were both colonised by European countries, namely the Netherlands and Britain respectively. The first Dutch expedition to Indonesia (East Indies) arrived in 1596 in search of spices. Soon after, Ricklefs says that the conflicts among Dutch companies led the *States-General* (Netherlands parliament) to merge the companies into the United East India Company, the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) in 1602. The States-General granted the VOC 'quasi- sovereign power' to recruit armies, build fortresses, wage war and negotiate treaties in Asia including the islands now known as Indonesia (Ricklefs, 2008: 29-30). Merle Calvin Ricklefs further claims that a Dutch colonial state was consolidated over the period from 1800 to 1910. The Javanese-European relationships took a new form when Marshal Herman Willem Daendels, Governor

General in Batavia in 1808, “treated Javanese lords not as lords over their society but as officials of the European administration and reduced their power and incomes” (135). Moreover, even though Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, the Dutch only recognized the formal transfer of sovereignty to the ‘Republik Indonesia Serikat’ (Republic of United States of Indonesia) in 1949.

Australia was ruled by the British from 26 January 1788, the date when Captain Arthur Philip arrived in New South Wales and “carried instruction to establish the first British colony in Australia”, the land that was called ‘*Terra Australis Incognita* (unknown southern land)’.<sup>1</sup> However, Ann Curthoys suggests that at that time Aboriginal peoples had settled the entire continent for around 45,000 years. They had diverse languages, dialects, and “each society was multilingual” (in Schreuder and Ward, 2008: 79). Even though the six British colonies federated as the Australian nation in 1901, many so-called Australians still saw themselves as British; furthermore, attitudes and policies concerning Indigenous peoples in Australia remained colonialist (96-97). The fact that the Dutch left Indonesia after independence is a major difference between the colonisation of Indonesia and that of Australia. Australia remains technically connected to its colonial power, although after 1901 the colonial British became settler Australians. The English monarch remains the official Head of State.

It is arguable, however, that having been colonised by European countries, the literatures of Indonesia and Australia do reflect similar patterns of experience. It is well known too that not only did colonisation create physical and mental sufferings for the colonised people, but it also changed the physical landscape of the

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, ‘European discovery and the colonization of Australia’, accessed 21 June 2011 <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/european-discovery-and-colonisation>



colonies and the identities of the individuals living therein. For instance, prior to the coming of the Dutch, there used to be a number of kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago. The Netherlands established the physical borders of Indonesia into a single colony named the Netherlands East Indies. As Adrian Vickers notes, “Dutch rule explains many aspects of Indonesia, because it provided administrative and economic foundations for the modern state. Legal systems, labour relations, urban development and many other aspects of present-day Indonesia were stamped by the Dutch” (2005: 2). Vickers also shows that the Dutch created a “special upper social class of the Indies: soldiers, administrators, managers, teachers, pioneers. They lived linked to, and yet separate from, their native subjects” (9). He further notes: “The traditional rulers and indigenous aristocracy were placed under the hierarchy of Dutch officials” (14). It is obvious that this hierarchy leaves the native and poor at the bottom. Even though the Dutch set up an Ethical Policy to improve the lives of the indigenous people in 1901, only the native elite could benefit from it (Vickers, 2005; Locher-Scholten, 2000).

Similar circumstances inflect British colonialism in Australia. Richard Broome points out that the vast numbers of the settlers coming to Australia brought “new diseases, plants, animals and new technologies, and with the blessing of the British Imperial Government, supplanted the original owners of the continent” (2010: 2). He further mentions:

Ecological change, disease, violence and force of numbers swept away Indigenous economies and supplanted them with new forms shaped by global capital. Patrick Wolfe and others have identified three strategies of settler colonialism: confrontation, incarceration and assimilation, which he has termed ‘the logic of elimination’ [1994: 99]. To justify these acts, settlers created images and knowledge that eulogised themselves as pioneers and wealth creators, and denigrated Indigenous people as non-producers and not worthy of owning the land. This discourse justified dispossession, and was followed by a Civilising Mission to change those seen not as different, but inferior (3).

Dispossessed in this way, Aboriginal peoples had to struggle to survive culturally, physically and economically (Andrews, 1997: 917). In so doing, they went through three kinds of violence: “alcoholic violence, traditional violence, and bullshit traditional violence” (Audrey Bolger in Behrendt, 2004: 7). Indigenous Australians were silenced for a long time after the first settlers arrived in Australia. Jeremy Beckett points out that it was not until the 1970s that their voice was represented by “administrators, missionaries, scientists, novelists” who “spoke of them, and occasionally for them, with such authority as to make a native voice seem unnecessary, even impossible. It was as though Aborigines were incapable of articulating their hopes and their history” (1994: 97).

On these points, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have argued that, “the relation between the colonisers and colonised was locked into a rigid hierarchy of difference deeply resistant to fair and equitable exchanges, whether economic, cultural or social” (1998: 46). Moreover, racism is also “a crucial part of the intercultural relations” in the colonies in which “minority indigenous people existed” (1998: 46). This is especially the case for women, since in societies such as Indonesia and Australia, patriarchy is typically a strand of hegemonic power and under colonialism women may be seen to be doubly disadvantaged. As Aania Loomba writes: “Their relationship to colonial discourses is mediated through this double positioning” (2002: 159). Judy Atkinson asserts that “colonised men take on the behaviours of and attitudes of their male colonisers, and in so doing, act in collusion to further oppress the colonised women” (cited in Behrendt, 2004: 6). Ashcroft *et al.*, quoting Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, note that “women in many societies have been relegated to the position of ‘Other’, marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, ‘colonised’, forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial

domination from positions deeply imbedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from, that *imperium*” (1998: 174). They further add that women, like post-colonial people, “share with colonised races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors” (1998: 174-175).

As Chandra T. Mohanty has shown, however, women are not oppressed to the same degree or in the same ways everywhere: “In fact, black, white, and other third world women have very different histories with respect to the particular inheritance of post-fifteenth-century Euro-American hegemony: the inheritance of slavery, enforced migration, plantation and indentured labour, colonialism, imperial conquest, and genocide” (1991: 10).

In Indonesia, the combined effect of extant Islamic practices and those of the Dutch colonisers affected women’s lives in multiple ways. Indeed, Evelyn Blackwood notes that the power of gender formulations in Islam works hand in hand with “Dutch masculinised culture and religion: in this setting, ‘women’s leadership and power in state and religious contexts’ are unjustifiable (2005: 859). Ann Laura Stoler further claims that “the colonizer’s world was a masculinised world in which men by nature were considered the fit rulers and leaders of nation and home” (in Blackwood, 2005: 864). The marginalisation of women occurs in all domains and in all classes. Consequently, women are dependent on their husbands legally and economically (861).

Colonisation in Australia also disadvantaged women, both Indigenous and settler women. Anne Summers in *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (1980) has examined the condition of women in Australia and argues that “women’s experience of being Australian differs fundamentally from men’s” (461). Even though

many men experienced exploitation in terms of class or race, they retained the benefits of their gender or the ‘superiority’ of their sex. They had “freedom of movement” and “the existential security of an identity bestowed by possessing a name which is indisputably theirs”, two things that women cannot access (461). The oppression of women appears in every area of their lives. For instance, women’s dependency upon men can be seen in the way traditionally they have taken up the surname, of their fathers and husbands respectively (461). Yet, the case is complicated by the ‘colonised’ white Australian women occupying a colonizing position in relation to Aboriginal women and men, something that will be explored further in the discussion of *Coonardoo* in later chapters of this dissertation.

In Australia, it was Aboriginal women who suffered the most from colonisation. They already lived under a mainly patriarchal social structure and, as Summers argues, since colonisation “White men in this country have almost always treated black women as whores, as women to have sex with (and maybe leave with half-caste babies) but not as women to marry” (1980: 130). The marginalisation of Aboriginal women occurs in the form of a “denial of their human, civil, political, legal, and sexual rights” (Jackie Huggins; Aileen Moreton-Robinson in Fredericks, 2010: 546).

As stated, among the three kinds of violence addressed to Aboriginal society, women were particularly vulnerable to “bullshit traditional violence”, which refers to physical attacks on them, “often by drunken men, which are then asserted by the perpetrators to be justified by reference to some traditional right” (Audrey Bolger in Behrendt, 2004: 7). Even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, says Summers, “They are discarded by the community for not being the right colour, the right sex – lacking in language, in education, in training, in available or accessible job opportunities,

ill-prepared to function in a white society, unable to get into the white service systems, unreached by birth control methods, producing children many of whom are destined for early death and the rest to live a life of poverty” (1980: 130).

The situation of Indonesian ‘native women’ under Dutch colonialism was different. In some cases, their social background would influence the way the colonial Dutch treated them. For example, only upper-class indigenous women (nobility/*priyayi*) were able to access formal education. Elizabeth Locher-Scholten states, “While colonial authorities considered women of the Indonesian elite open to education and change, they thought that women of the rural masses should be left in their own cultural environment as much as possible. Ultimately, colonial policies towards women and the family were mainly directed at women of the elites” (2000: 28-29). This created an anomalous position where low-class women were freed from the direct force of colonial oppression, but subject to poverty and exploitation in being subordinated to both colonialism and the native elite.

This thesis explores the complex power dynamics outlined above and the subjectivities they produce through an analysis of *The Girl* and *Coonardoo*. In their novels, Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Katharine Susannah Prichard explore many of the above issues. Both have employed historical reality as the setting or background for their work, telling the stories of two ordinary women, in part from ‘their own’ viewpoint to engage with the complex political histories of Indonesia and Australia. In this way they give voice to the oppressed and, as Maxim Gorki stated, let people know their history (in Kurniawan, 2002: 2). In Pramoedya’s own words, “If we don’t know our history, we’ll always make the same mistakes, the same year after year” (cited in Vatikiotis, 2000: 79). Echoing concerns of other writers from countries and cultures formerly colonised by European powers,

Pramoedya places his work within a broader structure of resistance and survival in which story-telling plays an important role in the production of a cultural memory. Pramoedya set his stories in the pre-World War II period, the Dutch colonial period, the Japanese occupation, the Indonesian revolution, and the Indonesian national movement (Kurniawan, 2002:1-2). He shows not only “the socio-political and socio-psychological developments in Indonesia during the period under discussion, but especially Pramoedya’s work have such a strong autobiographical strain that it sometimes reads as autobiography rather than fiction” (Teeuw, 1986: 163-164).

Of Prichard, Judah Waten claimed that, “When Australians of later generations want to know what their country and their people were like in the first half of the twentieth century, they will have to read the works of Katharine Susannah Prichard” (in Beasley, 1993: 9). In other words, Prichard too depicts the impact of historical change in Australia, particularly highlighting its effects on women and women’s rights activities, Aborigines, peace, and the socialist movement due to her political commitment to communism. Prichard was “the founding member of the Communist Party of Australia [and] together with Vance Palmer, Xavier Herbert, Eleanor Dark, and many more Australian writers, allied ‘liberal political ideals’ with ‘realist literary approaches’ during the 1930s” (Lever, 2011: 55, 58).

In their novels, Pramoedya and Prichard engage the history of women’s conditions in Indonesia and Australia during colonialism, analysed by Blackwood and Summers. In *The Girl from the Coast* (hereafter *the Girl*), Pramoedya deals with Javanese nobility and commoners living under Dutch colonialism; whilst in *Coonardoo*, Prichard takes up the theme of Aboriginal lives under the legacy of British imperialism. In these novels, both writers depict the experience of subjugated peoples, particularly female characters, in dealing with

gender oppression in both patriarchal and colonial societies.

My choice of Pramoedya's *The Girl* and Prichard's *Coonardoo* as the object of this study relates to some aspects that the authors share and to the fact that their novels address comparable feminist postcolonial topics. As noted above, Pramoedya and Prichard represent female characters, the Girl and Coonardoo respectively, whose selves are shaped and framed by life in patriarchal and colonial societies. However, both the Girl and Coonardoo are strong characters who can resist their subaltern status, either by radically reacting towards their subjugation or by adopting silence as a strategy through which to fight back and survive.

This study will compare the representation of women's identity and women's resistance in *The Girl* (1991) and *Coonardoo* (1975), highlighting how women are identified by society; how their identities are different and/or similar in Javanese and Aboriginal contexts; what kinds of resistance are inscribed in the texts; and how their strategies of resistance are different and/or similar in both texts. Moreover, and as the titles of each work suggest, both novels focus primarily on the female characters, and male characters are given only secondary attention. Yet, as men are the other gender and have enormous impact on gender relations, their role in the novels will also be investigated. Characters such as the Bendoro in Pramoedya and Hugh and Sam Geary in Prichard ensure that the novels can make a significant intervention in a critique of gender and class relations in colonial settings in Indonesia and Australia. Comparisons such as those undertaken in my dissertation are especially important for the way in which they foreground the role of imaginative literature in the analysis of colonialism.

In contrast to Prichard, Pramoedya came from a country in which "English never played a very important role" (Niekerk, 2003: 58). Therefore, his name "is

not mentioned in impressively well-researched surveys of postcolonial literature and his works are not listed in their bibliographies” (Boehmer, in Roosa and Ratih, 2001: 2681). John Roosa and Ayu Ratih argue that the marginalisation of Pramoedya in postcolonial writing is due to “the postcolonial critic’s preoccupation with the English language literature of the countries of the Ex-British Empire, India in particular” (2681). They state: “In literary criticism the term ‘postcolonial’ has partly emerged out of studies of British Commonwealth literature and is still occasionally used to refer exclusively to that literature. The omission of Pramoedya as a writer from a former Dutch colony writing in Indonesian remains glaring nonetheless, especially when many writers from former French colonies have been included in the informal postcolonial canon” (2681).

Hence, if the focus of postcolonial studies is on British Commonwealth literature, it might be said that instead of stepping out from the canon, this sub-disciplinary focus only creates another new canon. Kwame Anthony Appiah notes: “Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia [*sic*]: a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (cited in Loomba, 2005: 246). Carl Niekerk argues that this construction implies two aspects: first, it involves the thought of Western intellectuals who merely “privilege the literature of those who, at least to some extent, are familiar with metropolitan societies themselves, because any other type of literature is too sentimental, too primitive in its ideological alliances, or, in other words, not good literature” (2003: 58). Secondly, other postcolonial literature which is not written in English is not able to “contribute to a more complex understanding of the postcolonial condition or even to a rethinking of some



of postcolonial theory's basic assumption" (58). Thus Niekerk proposes that there must be "a call for a broader focus for postcolonial studies" (2003: 58) because "the contemporary practice of postcolonial studies could benefit from approaches putting more emphasis on the importance of local perspective" (2003: 66). In my study, I am adding to postcolonial studies an analysis of two local perspectives, one less familiar than the other, in part to show how Indonesian literature can be included in a wider comparative framework. Hence, the study aims to expand the scope of postcolonial studies from its predominantly British/English-language focus and encourages further research in comparative studies between Indonesian and Australian literature through a prism of feminist postcolonial studies, particularly related to the colonised women's identity and resistance to the double subjugation of patriarchy and colonialism.

As an Indonesian scholar, I come from an educational institution that still privileges canonical works of English literature. However, this focus is beginning to veer towards literature in English from many other countries outside of England; this may include writing from the countries formerly colonised by Britain, such as India, Australia, Malaysia, or from former colonies of Holland and France, such as Indonesia and African nations. The present project aims also to give more 'space' for 'other' literatures in English in my institution and the focus on Prichard's *Coonardoo* hopefully will break new ground for the study of Australian literature in Indonesia, where it is not as popular as English and American literature. Re-thinking Australia's and Indonesia's cultural and political position in the region urges us to search for connections and links that may help inform Australians and Indonesians about shared but perhaps unnoticed or underemphasised traditions.

Finally, this study is important because although Indonesia and Australia are

regularly connected by both political tensions and cooperation, in the media, few academic studies in media reports compare their literatures and the colonial pasts that both link and divide them.

It is my argument that, as already noted, many similarities can be found between the dynamics of colonial cultural politics, the writers' political and stylistic orientations, and the novels' focus on female characters, even though the Girl and Coonardoo are subordinated differently in terms of class and race in each country. The oppression of colonial and patriarchal systems occurs more emphatically in *Coonardoo* than in *The Girl*. At some points, both women show compliance but in their own particular ways they also subvert this domination. Basing my reading on the similarities of colonial and gender power relations, I will go on to show how differences in such situations find expression in the lives of each female character in the selected novels. A related concern is how the positions of the two authors are linked but differently articulated.

Another similarity that the novels share is a concern with displacement in the context of colonial impact on individuals' sense of place and identity. In *The Girl*, the process of the Girl's identity shifts from her past as a villager, a child, a labourer, a commoner, an unmarried maid, to a townswoman, a 'practice wife', a 'first lady', a parasitic/dependent, and a birth-mother whose daughter is taken over brutally by the Bendoro. This will be compared to the identification process that occurs in *Coonardoo*, covering Coonardoo's displacement as a stranger in her own land, being dependent on a new system of culture and economics, and alienated from the accepted role of a wife in her own world view.

While gender and class discrepancies also exist under the racial colonial circumstances depicted in *Coonardoo*, *The Girl* deals primarily with a clash that

results from the social structures that place both Javanese aristocrats and commoners under Dutch colonialism. In this case, colonialism was mostly the shadow of patriarchal domination in Javanese aristocratic society. To put it differently, Dutch colonialism exists in the novel only as a very faint presence. Indeed, Teeuw has proposed that this has been one of the remarkable things that characterise Pramoedya's writings. The Dutch colonisers seldom appear in his texts; rather, "they are 'the invisible enemy', as it has been formulated" (1997: 254). Yet, Pramoedya clearly draws on some Dutch values and historical events under Dutch period, such as Dutch language and table manners practised by the Javanese noblemen, the building of military road in Java under Marshall H.W. Daendels's period, Java War and the first Javanese noble woman who received Dutch education, R.A. Kartini. Moreover, despite obvious differences, the Australian station owner in *Coonardoo* is a kind of local nobility owing some of his/her power to British imperial race and class economy.

Another major difference occurs in the forms of resistance practised by the female characters depicted in both novels, one of the key concerns in my dissertation. In *The Girl*, the major female character subverts hegemonic power in a pretty radical way. She keeps questioning many values that she encounters in the Javanese nobleman's mansion, the values that she considers inhuman and very different from those in her coastal area. In contrast, the way Prichard depicts subaltern resistance in *Coonardoo* is not as obvious. Coonardoo both complies with and questions her master's world in her silence. Coonardoo is "always giving quietly to others, tolerating everything without murmur, [and] died taking along with her deep feelings and desires which had never been heard by the one whom she cared for, her whole life" (Raina, 2010: 109).

The way each author depicts the resistance of the subjugated might also be determined by their own position in society. As a 'native' Indonesian, Pramoedya was subject to colonial oppression, while Prichard arguably was 'part of the problem' in a historical sense, as a white woman and a member of the coloniser/settler community. The different personal backgrounds of the authors will be investigated for the way in which they may inflect the development of the stories.

The study will aim to address the following main questions:

1. How do patriarchy and colonialism construct the identity of the main female characters in Pramoedya's *The Girl* and Prichard's *Coonardoo*?
2. How do the socio-historical contexts in each novel determine the nature and extent of resistance by doubly colonised women in Pramoedya's *The Girl* and Prichard's *Coonardoo*?
3. How do the ideological allegiances of each author inflect the characterisation and narrative outcomes of their novels?

Pramoedya's *The Girl from the Coast* (1991) and Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1975) have been the subject of extensive scholarly attention. Besides the studies of *The Girl* undertaken in English, there are several 'graduating papers' written in Indonesian by undergraduate students, work that is equivalent to a Honour's thesis in Australia and work that I have been able to consult. However, I did not find any comparative research focusing specifically on *The Girl* and *Coonardoo*, a point that demonstrates the potential for my work to make a genuinely original contribution to scholarly research on both texts and their authors.

Else Liliani (2003), Sri Penny Alifiya (2004), and I.B. Manuaba (2003) highlight Pramoedya's concern with humanistic values in his writings. They

basically agree that this novel portrays the feudalism practised by the Javanese aristocrats leading to degradation of humanistic values. Unlike Liliani, Alifiya and Manuaba, who focus on the degradation of humanity through the practice of feudalism depicted in the novel, in my previous research (2009) I unveil ideological formations, foregrounding in my work patriarchy, humanism, colonialism, modernity, and nationalism. By drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', I scrutinise how an author's perspective informs the values the novel examines and how these in turn shape the consciousness of the commoners. In doing so, the dominant classes negotiate their ideological function in society through some characters who act as their surrogate political voice. Much research to date on Pramoedya's novel mainly investigates the relationship between aristocrats and commoners, and ignores the colonial situation in which the story takes place. What is missed from this research is the fact that even though Dutch colonialism only serves as the dark shadow in the story, it actually contributes to the way the Javanese upper classes treats the lower classes. As stated, the Dutch ruled the people indirectly through the Javanese ruling class and progressively replaced the aristocrats' position.

Critics such as Eka Kurniawan, Andries Teeuw and Andrea Kempf also point to the intertwining of ideology and politics in this novel. Pramoedya's involvement with *Lekra* (*Lembaga Kedaulatan Rakyat*/ the Stalinist-influenced People's Cultural Association) in 1950-1965, they argue, gives his work a 'heavy-handed-political-message' (Kurniawan, 2002: 103). Regarding culture as inseparable from society and politics, the motto, "politics is in command", characterized the work of art in *Lekra* (Kurniawan, 2002: 93; Heinschke, 1996: 147). The publication in 1962 of *The Girl* as a series in *Lentera*, the literary column of *Bintang Timur*, a

newspaper backed by the Indonesian Nationalist Party, leads Teeuw to argue that this is also an ideological work, even though there is a shift of ideology and politics from the previous period under the strong influence of *Lekra* (cited in Kurniawan, 2002: 118). Writing on *The Girl*, Kempf (2003) asserts that “Pramoedya is regularly criticized for producing novels that are more polemic than fiction, for creating characters that are symbols of his ideology rather than rounded human beings. Yet this graceful narrative tells a universal story, of an individual who is victimized by societal structures and, despite the cruelty of those in power, survives”.<sup>2</sup> How Pramoedya structures his narrative might be influenced by his interest in socialist realism which will always have a militant political message because it has a mission to eliminate the oppression of the lower classes as well as dispel imperialism-colonialism (in Kurniawan, 2002: 112).

In their work, critics such as Tineke Hellwig (1994), Joy Press (2002), Julia Tiner (2002), and Supriyadi (2004) foreground the dynamic between gender and politics in *The Girl*. All of them underline that this novel portrays how women are oppressed by the social system of the era. Hellwig asserts that *The Girl* also represents “the sexual politics and power relationships on various levels of the period around 1900 [and] how the various power structures and repressive mechanisms were aimed at crushing” the few rights of Javanese women at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in this novel (1994: 93). With the ending of the novel on a ‘cruel forced separation’ between the Girl and her daughter, Hellwig argues that the Girl is powerless in a man-dominated world. However, in my reading of the novel I will dispute Hellwig’s finding, arguing that the Girl is not always a

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<sup>2</sup> Kempf, Andrea. ‘The Girl from the Coast by Pramoedya Ananta Toer’, accessed 23 June 2011 [http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=lib\\_pp&sei-redir=1#search=Andrea+Kempf+and+The+Girl+from+the+Coast](http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=lib_pp&sei-redir=1#search=Andrea+Kempf+and+The+Girl+from+the+Coast)

powerless character, since at times she calls into question the ideology of the dominant class.

A critical prism shared by Umilia Rohani (2000) and Elizabeth Coville (2005) stresses the way the main character adjusts herself to the new world. Coville notes:

In a series of dialogues with informal mentors—her female servant, the driver of a horse cart, and her father—and with herself, she questions and describes the worlds of both nobility and commoners. Of particular relevance is the poignant perspective she comes to assume with regard to her own village, where her keen ear allows us to hear the sounds of village life (e.g. language usage, social interaction, ritual performance, *adat*, etc.) and grasp its significance.

However, these two critics miss the point that in the adjustment process, the Girl not only ‘grasps the significance’ of the new world, she also, to some extent, resists the new values that she considers inhuman. This may also be seen to reflect the ideological or activist views of the author. Some critics also observe the depiction of historical facts in the novel, tracing this aspect to Pramoedya’s commitment to producing a literature that speaks the nation and its ideals. Tineke Hellwig (1994), Kurniawan (2002), Sandy English (2003), and Kempf (2003) agree that *The Girl* represents the beginning of a phase in which Pramoedya overtly employed history in his writing. Even though it does not depict the ‘great’ national history like his later works, *The Girl*’s attention to Pramoedya’s own maternal grandmother’s story is deeply embedded in the history of Indonesia. English (2003) claims that the elements of sociological reliability may emerge from an author’s political beliefs, since “in a successful work of art, a character can be both individualized and universal, both a shy teenager exposed to abuse and the

‘banner of oppressed Indonesian womanhood’”.<sup>3</sup> Kempf (2003) argues that in his writing Pramoedya rendered much of the cruelty of Indonesian history during the Dutch colonial period, such as “the building of the big road in Java, during the course of which most of the labourers' babies died; the hypocrisy of the Bendoro, who prays several times a day and devotedly studies the Koran while treating his servants and his ‘practice’ wife like subhuman beings; the precariousness of village life, where each day death may come because of the Dutch, the nobility, pirates, or the ocean itself”.<sup>4</sup>

However, history in the novel is not just a series of ‘historical facts’, it is rendered as a series of events in which people are affected by an array of forces and circumstances. For Kempf, Pramoedya’s ‘flat characters’ seem to act as the political vehicle of the author (2003). Pramoedya has admitted this in an interview with National Public Radio in Washington D.C. in 1991: “I, through my characters, try to invite people to look at history, to re-evaluate history and their own role in it. And I imagine the government fears for themselves. What would happen if people actually do begin to look at their own history and the role of the government in it?” Moreover, in the original edition of *The Girl*, the publisher, *Lentera Dipantara*, comments that this novel criticises Javanese feudalism which does not have courtesy and humanistic values (2003). The characters in the novel are made to carry the history and power relations of the colonial period.

Some reviews of *The Girl* deal with its treatment of religion. David Raybin, for one, stresses that ‘institutionalized religion’ plays an important role in the

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<sup>3</sup> English, Sandy. ‘The probability of dissent’, accessed June 23 2011 <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/nov2003/pram-n05.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> Kempf, Andrea. ‘The Girl from the Coast by Pramoedya Ananta Toer’, accessed 23 June 2011 [http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=lib\\_pp&sei-redir=1#search="Andrea+Kempf+and+The+Girl+from+the+Coast](http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=lib_pp&sei-redir=1#search=)



oppression of women and preservation of 'husband's authority' (2009: 182). The Girl is made by Pramoedya to bear universal ideas of questioning the institutional faith in Eastern piety. Similarly, Mansour Fakih (2003), an Indonesian scholar on gender and social transformation, claims that the novel unpacks the capitalism related to the domination of religion in that period. Yet, in my reading of *The Girl*, religion is not the only matter upholding gender discrimination, since the Bendoro's power is determined also by his social class and feudal relations.

As with *The Girl*, numerous studies have been made of *Coonardoo*. Miles Franklin (1956), J.J. Healy (1968), Harry Heseltine (1979), Sue Thomas (1987), Clare Corbould (1999), and Van Ikin (1983) discuss the encounter of Aborigines or Aboriginal culture with white culture. As Franklin notes, the usual ending for the 'black velvet' theme at that time was that the white men would leave the dark women "to pine away or to commit suicide" (1956: 193). Healy, Heseltine, Thomas, Corbould and Ikin share similar views about the confrontation of the native and settler values in the novel in terms of 'white woman's prejudices' and 'racial inferiority'. Prichard's examination of the "civilization/savagery and good/evil polarities of the colonialist Manichean allegory through Mrs. Bessie, Hugh's and Saul's registrations of Aboriginal cultural difference and the history of interracial encounters" in the novel confront "white racist attitudes to aboriginals and aboriginal culture" (Thomas, 235); yet, they also counter the fallacy and stereotyped ideas of Aboriginal values by other white characters. For instance, Prichard refers to Indigenous Australians and their cultures as 'primitive' in her preface, which contrasts with her effort to describe the ability of Aborigines, their sophisticated knowledge of hunting grounds, tracking skills and so on in the novel. *Coonardoo* was seen as the victim of "Hugh's psychologically sustaining heroic

melodrama”, “Mrs Bessie’s feminine socialization of her”, “an aboriginal cultural socialization”, and “black male trade in her sexual body to meet developing black male consumerist interest in white goods” (Thomas, 242). Ikin, too, says that having the qualities of ‘white women’s prejudices’, such as “scheming, possessive and manipulative”, makes Bessie to be “out of tune” with “the forces of time and nature” that the Aborigine people respect and venerate (211). Similarly, Hugh is also “out of tune”, since his white ideals cannot meet Coonardoo’s needs (212). However, in my view, Ikin’s finding about Bessie being ‘out of tune’ with the Aborigines seems to be undermined by the fact that in the novel she is integrated into nature/Aboriginal thinking by her spirit taking the form of a cockatoo after she passes away.

Aboriginal people’s exploitation – at least in economic and sexual matters – is discussed by Claudia D Johnson (2002), Sue Kossew (1997), Cath Ellis (1995; 2003), Anshu Raina (2010), Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (2008), Leigh Dale (1994) and Susan Lever (2011). For example, native women were sexually exploited because white men outnumbered white women in the bush (Johnson, 2002). Dale highlights that this situation reflects “the operation of colonial and patriarchal power upon the bodies of indigenous women” (1994: 129). She says,

For Hughie to acknowledge Winning-ara’s right of inheritance to the station would be to acknowledge the priority of Coonardoo’s relationship to the land. Through ‘illegitimate’ sexual activity, the borderline of (legitimate) white authority is crossed, but the power to repudiate the consequences of that crossing is still in the hands of the white man. The same power is reflected in Hughie’s *modus operandi*, which is to seek his truth through torture. His own trivial anxieties are magnified and dramatized by being literally inscribed upon the body of Coonardoo, who not only bears his blows, but succumbs in the end to the sexual contamination (literally, venereal disease) that is Hughie’s ultimate fear (139).

However, with regards to the notion of ‘whiteness as queenliness’, Probyn-

Rapsey reveals the fact that the promotion of ‘sisterhood’ between settler and Indigenous women ‘on the basis of shared maternity’ and ‘a shared status as British subjects’ is proven to be a ‘part of colonization itself’ (2008: 75-77). Myra Tonkinson finds that the relationships among them are “of mistress and servant, custodian and charge, teacher and pupil, occasionally mentor and protégé, or co-workers” (cited in Probyn- Rapsey, 76). Nevertheless, white women also experienced discrimination in the man- dominated world in which they ‘queened’ over the Aboriginal women, yet at the same time they themselves were ‘slaves’ of the man-dominated world (76). These situations – “the recording of conditions for Aborigines on outback stations, and the nature of sexual relations between white men and black women” – [might reflect] a political act” (Lever, 59). Lever states that *Coonardoo* is “the work of a communist who was attempting to find a form of realism which could engage with political questions” (57), even though the novel works “in literary ways which complicate any apparently simple mimetic function” (59). However, for Ellis, *Coonardoo* does not represent “communist or socialist objectives”, and thus it was criticized by the Socialist Realist critics (2003: 218). Ellis’ opinion might be based on the fact that *Coonardoo* was written before 1933, when Prichard ‘converted’ to Socialist Realism (203). Furthermore, the objectives of communism or socialist realism in *Coonardoo* might not be as obvious as those in her Goldfields Trilogy – *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948) and *Winged Seeds* (1950) – which has displayed the influence of “the ideological and political convictions of the CPA (Communist Party of Australia) and its principal guiding force of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union)” (Ellis, 2003: 204). However, just like an episode in a literary work or a section in an academic writing, the bases of her later works have already been put in the episodes/sections

that precede them, and *Coonardoo* might be one of them. Seeing the fact that Aboriginal people are the lower classes, both in the text and in reality, and how the love story between an Aboriginal woman and a white man was considered taboo at that time, as well as that Prichard depicts cattle industries in the north-west outback owned by Bessie and Sam Geary who employ natives in their stations, *Coonardoo* still reflects socialist realist ideas. The ‘fight’ over realism will be used in the analysis of *Coonardoo* to reveal the extent of left political goals reflected in the novel. This is also the case in *The Girl*, which is not as popular as the *Buru Quartet*, published much later. However, as stated, this is still an ideological work, as it was published at the time when Pramoedya worked on the historical material for his *Buru Quartet* (Hellwig, 1994: 70). *The Girl* is seen as the beginning of the third phase in Pramoedya’s ideological formation when history is used as the setting of his stories (Kurniawan, 2002: 118).

Many critics comment on the text’s use of water and remark that the plot is strongly connected to water; even the title of the novel implies water. Located in the outback of Australia, water plays significant role in the station and cattle industry life. Bernadette Feher (1996) says that *Coonardoo*’s “daily showers have a sexual connotation”, since “they become a means of preparing her body for Hugh and are thus symbols of waiting, of expectation” (38). Hugh is also often identified with rain in the novel (39). Clare Corbould (1999) further points out that when Hugh decided not to have sex with Mollie anymore, the drought came, and the drought was broken when *Coonardoo* could stop running away from Geary. Moreover, the birth of Winnie (Hugh’s and *Coonardoo*’s illegitimate son) was followed by rain (Feher, 1996: 39). For Feher, water in the novel represents life and death; *Coonardoo*’s life and death are tied up with the well at Wytaliba. Corbould proposes

that, “The association between sex and droughts is made throughout the text, and goes to the heart of Prichard’s construction of sexuality” (420); thus, “there is an analogy between human need for sex and the land’s need for water” (420). Given the use of water in *Coonardoo* and *The Girl*, water might also symbolize a cleansing ritual, one that ‘purifies’ and ‘re-constructs’ the image of those people who are about to enter into the nobility in *The Girl* or to go through the white world in *Coonardoo*.

Jenny Noble studies Prichard’s and Australian author Eleanor Dark’s work from the perspective of socio-feminist theory on health, contagion and the female body. Noble discloses that ‘the literary mother-figure’ represented in the two authors’ novels often contrasts with the mainstream one which is symbolized in the political and religious discourses as well as in popular culture such as advertisements, movies, and women’s magazines. The latter ‘ideal’ representation of the mother figure has something to do with “nationalist discourses of racial hygiene, of Christian morality, and of civic social order controlled by such patriarchal institutions as the state, the church, the law, and the medical professions during the period under review”. Yet, in their post-war novels, the authors tend to depict the mother figure based on the ‘idealised notion of motherhood’. Noble concludes that “the discursive body of mother-figures in their inter-war novels serves as a trope through which otherwise unspoken tensions – between the personal and the political, between family and nation and between identity and race in Australian cultural formation” (2005: v).

As the above literature review shows, much critical work on *The Girl* and *Coonardoo* has focused on how women are depicted. Nonetheless, a comparison of these elements in these two novels has not been done. Moreover, while much

attention has been given to the place of white women in *Coonardoo*, Coonardoo's own position has not been fully examined. As I will argue, this is an oversight that the comparison with *The Girl* will bring into play and seek to address. Similarly, a postcolonial approach to *The Girl* will bring out ideas not yet examined, whereas the Indonesian perspective shows up Australian aspects. My analysis seeks to expand the discussion by comparing the women's identities found in the novels with different social background.

As stated earlier, this study will also investigate ideas of women's resistance, again an aspect that has not been deeply explored by critical work on both novels. Sometimes because of the limitation of everyday language in *Coonardoo* and the limitation of freedom of expression in *The Girl*, songs become the medium to express criticism of discrimination or "to communicate the emotional lives" (Lever, 1993: 24). Furthermore, the tragic ends the girls meet – death for Coonardoo and divorce and discarding for the Girl – might be seen as their stepping outside the boundaries of the cultural codes to resist the dominant power.

These points lead me to employ the work on identity and resistance proposed by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1998), Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in their *Identities* (1995), Ketu H. Katrak in *Politics of the Female Body* (2006), Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2002), Gayatri C. Spivak in "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'ambivalence' in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

My investigation, while informed by the theoretical works mentioned, will be based on close textual analysis of situations and characters for image/behaviour patterns, and of gender discourse. The examination will be in the form of a

comparison between the two novels in terms of their similarities and differences, as well as discussion of the relations of each author to their socio-historical contexts. It is hoped that these comparisons will allow useful reflection on the specification of gender and postcolonial theory connections.

I have read the original of *The Girl* in Indonesian – *Gadis Pantai* (1987) – but will cite from Harry Aveling’s translation. Although opinion on the reliability of translations differs, I note that Dwi Elyono finds Aveling’s method tends to sustain the source language’s “complexities of meanings and their associations, the source language texture, and the author’s style” (2006: 106).

The thesis consists of six chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. The introductory chapter will outline the structural points of the thesis such as background of the study, aims of the research, research questions, significance of the research, review on related studies, theories and methods of the study, as well as chapter outline. Chapter one is devoted to Pramoedya and Prichard’s lives and works. It discusses their shared vision in relation to post-colonialism, left politics and feminism. This chapter also discusses the theorizing of women’s identity and resistance as well as subalternity. Chapter two elaborates on the general concept of women identity in Javanese and Aboriginal societies. Chapter three examines Pramoedya’s *The Girl*, focusing on women’s identities under Javanese patriarchal society and Dutch colonialism, as well as women’s resistance to Javanese aristocrats and Dutch colonialism. Chapter four deals with Prichard’s *Coonardoo* through a focus on women’s identity in Aboriginal patriarchal and colonial society and their resistance to these ideologies. The concluding chapter recapitulates and reflects on the findings of how the main female characters obtain their identities under patriarchy and colonialism as well as how they resist double subjugation.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **AUTHORS' LIVES AND WORK**

In this chapter, I analyse the lives of Pramoedya and Prichard to argue that their work relates to politics, to (post)-colonial ideas and to gender awareness of their times, which will be followed by theoretical background related to the three concepts reflected in their work. Their consistent determination to portray social problems permeates their writing, and becomes the reason for their literary reputation. As demonstrated earlier, both authors are influenced by similar backgrounds: living during colonial periods in each country and having a political interest in communism that promotes engagement with social struggles for class and gender equity. However, Pramoedya writes from the perspective of the 'native', while Prichard comes from that of a settler society. Moreover, if Prichard never hid her commitment to communism, Pramoedya never claimed that he was a communist (Samuels in Pramoedya, 1999: xvi), even though in some sources he was believed to share the same leftist political vision. Some critics suggest also that Pramoedya's works do not portray gender issues as often and consistently as those written by Prichard. Yet, women play an important role in his work, either actively or passively. To some degree, being a male writer must influence Pramoedya's viewpoint in depicting women's struggle.

The theoretical background covers socialist realism as well as the concept of identity and resistance framed in feminist and postcolonial theories in patriarchal colonised societies with a particular focus on Indonesia (Javanese society) and Australia (Aboriginal society). The selected novels depict how female characters negotiate their identities in patriarchal and colonial systems. Indeed, Rajeswari



Sunder Rajan and You-me Park propose postcolonial feminism as “an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender, nation, race, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights” (2000: 53). My own work will show how the experience of women as doubly colonised subjects is articulated across such intersections according to local specifics of history, society and cultural values in Java and Northern Australia.

### **Authors’ lives**

#### **Pramoedya Ananta Toer**

Two stages in Pramoedya’s life that influence his worldview and his writings are his childhood in Blora, a small town in north-central Java, and his political and literary activism in Jakarta. Born on 6 February 1925, he died in Jakarta 30 April 2006. He was the first of nine children. His father, Mastoer, was a teacher and his mother, Oemi Saidah was a daughter of a spiritual leader, a *penghulu*, in Rembang. Mastoer’s activism in politics as a member of the Indonesian Nationalist Party as well as in education as a teacher in IBO (*Institut Boedi Oetomo*), influenced Pramoedya in his later life as a nationalist. However, on other occasions, Pramoedya was also disappointed with his father. For instance, when his father decided to return to his initial job as a teacher in a government Dutch-Indigenous School, HIS (*Holandsch Inlandsche School*), Pramoedya thought that his father had compromised himself by engaging with the colonial Dutch. Yet, he understood that the family’s economic condition was the reason for his father’s decision. The most serious conflict with his father arose when he disappointed his father by being only a moderate pupil in his father’s school. Their tension was even stronger “when the father, disappointed in his nationalist ideals, began to gamble,

thereby worsening the family's financial situation" (Teeuw, 1986: 164). Pramoedya's pride and disappointments in his father affect many of his writings. For example, to some extent, the characters of the Bendoro in *The Girl* and the father in *Cerita dari Blora* ('Stories from Blora', 1952) recall his father. Being colonial, feudal and patriarchal, these characters cannot live in a free and modern Indonesia (Teeuw, 1997: 13).

Because of the family's economic difficulties, his mother had to act as the backbone of the family, doing 'anything and everything' from cooking, baking, weaving cloth, making batik, tilling and tidying the garden, as well as manufacturing sweet soy sauce and coconut oil (Pramoedya, 1999: 130). As a *penghulu's* daughter, his mother had never experienced this kind of labour. This sometimes led to conflict between her and Pramoedya's father which is reflected in much of Pramoedya's work (Teeuw, 1986: 164). As Swami Anand Haridas points out, when Pramoedya's parents fought over problems such as money, his father's relatives living in their house and his father's gambling addiction, Pramoedya was more likely to stand up for his mother than for his father (1978: 49). His mother, a soft, gentle, strong and very strict person, was very dear to Pramoedya. She was the greatest inspiration of Pramoedya's writings. She always supported Pramoedya when his father discouraged him (Kurniawan, 2002: 18). Her motivation and "the moral value of her devotion as a mother and wife, and as an educator and of her children are the lasting values" (Pramoedya, 1999:170) that became the standard for Pramoedya to measure the quality of women whom he met and for the ideal female characters in many of his writings (Teeuw in Kurniawan, 2002: 17) such as *The Girl*, *This Earth of Mankind* (1980), and some short stories in the collection of short stories in 'Stories from Blora' (Samuels in Pramoedya, 1999: xiv; Kurniawan, 2002: 16-17).

The second important period in Pramoedya's life was when he left Blora to go to Jakarta after his mother passed away. In this phase, he not only experienced major progress in his biographical, historical and literary writing, but was also imprisoned three times: in the Dutch, Soekarno, and Soeharto periods. His first novel was written while working in the army, but the manuscript was lost. Reasons such as "corruption, the rivalry, and the conflicts of interests" led Pramoedya to give up his job in the army (Teeuw, 1964: 165). In 1947, he worked in the Voice of Free Indonesia, the former Dutch colonial government radio station, and wrote fiction regularly (*ibid*). However, his writing activity was interrupted when he was caught by the Dutch police officers for carrying papers regarded as threatening the Dutch government. During his two-year imprisonment, his writing blossomed. With help from Prof. G.J. Resink, these novels and short stories were eventually published while Pramoedya was still in prison (165).

Around three years after being released from the Dutch prison, he visited two countries, Holland and China. His impression of these two countries was very different. Old established Holland, for him, was like a dead country, compared to Indonesia which was still in "the process of establishing itself and seeking an identity" (Teeuw, 1964: 166). In contrast, he was excited to see "the achievements of Chinese revolution", the "socioeconomic progress and nation building" in Peking (*ibid*). His openness toward the cultural and political situation in China played a part in shifting Pramoedya's viewpoint into left cultural and political ideals (Liu, 1996: 131). This became the reason behind his second and third imprisonment. In Soekarno's era, he was put in jail for publishing *Hoakiau di Indonesia* (*The Chinese in Indonesia*, 1960), a controversial book about Chinese people and their role in Indonesian history (166-167). Afterwards, in Soeharto's era in 1965, the Indonesian

Communist Party (PKI) was blamed for the kidnapping and murder of six senior army officers. Thus, because of his active involvement in *Lekra*, the cultural wing of PKI, not only was Pramoedya imprisoned, but his writings were also destroyed and banned in the New Order era in 13 October 1965 including the other two parts of a multi-generational trilogy *The Girl* (Samuels in Pramoedya, 1999: xiv-xvii). Since some of the founding fathers of *Lekra*, such as D.N. Aidit and Njoto, also belonged to the Communist Party, this organization and Pramoedya too were seen as communist, though not all the members of *Lekra* belonged to the Communist Party (Kurniawan, 2002: 89-91). In 1980, the government officially banned Pramoedya's works such as the *Buru Tetralogy* accusing them of containing Marxist theories and being the work of an ex-tapol (*tahanan politik*) or an ex-political prisoner. The publication of *The Girl* in book form in 1987 was also banned (Hellwig, 1994: 71). However, through translation, his works became popular overseas, leading to at least twenty awards for him since 1951 and the Nobel Prize in literature nomination in 2005 (Shohifullah, 2009: 29-30). Even though his books were taken out from circulation, they were still secretly distributed among various groups in Indonesia, and they could still be found in Malaysia (Hellwig, 1994: 71). His works were translated into Dutch, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Czech. Because of the numerous translations of his work, Pramoedya became the first of the top ten Indonesian authors translated (Aveling, 2008: 16).

### **Katharine Susannah Prichard**

Born in Levuka, Fiji, on 4 December 1883, Prichard died in Perth, Western Australia on 2 October 1969, and was the first child of four. Her father, Tom Henry

Prichard, was an editor of newspapers such as *Fiji Times*, *Sun* and *Daily Telegraph*. Prichard's family also experienced economic problems, since her father was out of work for long periods. As the eldest daughter, she had to stay at home to help her mother. This also led to her unfortunate experience in education. Even though she was granted a half scholarship to study at South Melbourne College and passed the matriculation exam, her mother's illness, the family's economic problems, and the higher priority for her brother's education prevented her from going to university. Instead, John Hay says that she became a governess, attended night lectures at Melbourne University and worked in journalism.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Prichard's childhood dream to be a writer was inspired by her admiration of her father. However, like Pramoedya, it was Prichard's mother who gave support to her 'writerly ambitions' (Bird, 2000: viii). Yet, quite differently from Pramoedya, who was devastated by his mother's death, Prichard was overwhelmed by the tragic deaths of her father and husband. Both of them committed suicide in 1907 and 1933 respectively (ix, x). Prichard's interest in English and European literature played a part in her early fictional writings. They were published in some newspapers in Melbourne in the children columns.<sup>6</sup> Colin Roderick states that her later fictions that were mostly set in the outback portray "all the varied human types that live and toil there [with] an [unmistakable] Australian atmosphere [and] a glow of compassion".<sup>7</sup> She has shown her serious

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<sup>5</sup> Hay, John. 'Prichard, Katharine Susannah (1883–1969)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography', Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/prichard-katharine-susannah-8112>, accessed 1 December 2011.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, a short biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard in *The Australian Literature Resource*, <http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=node/12120>, accessed 6 July 2011

concerns about the social condition through her fictional and non-fictional prose. As Delys Bird claims, “Prichard’s sympathetic awareness of social inequalities and injustices was keen from an early age, despite her upbringing in a conservative middle-class family” (2000: xiii). Her journalistic writings were filled with themes of war, victims of poverty and oppression.<sup>8</sup> These factors play a part in her left political ideals and socialist realism. For Prichard, socialism would bring equality to women (Throssel, 1988: xvii).

Socialist realism has become the doctrine of the left-cultural wing in which writers, as “the engineer of souls”, have a responsibility to portray the struggle of working-class people (Lever, 2011: 58). Bird says that “from the time the news of the Russian Revolution reached Australia, [Prichard’s] adherence to Marxism as well as her belief in the eventual achievement of a socialist utopia in Soviet Russia – and ultimately in Australia – never faltered” (2000: xiii). She firstly encountered Socialist Realism in 1933 during her visit to the Soviet Union (Ellis, 2003: 204) and Pat Buckridge states, “Prichard’s realist techniques were forged before the establishment of an official Communist Party doctrine of socialist realism” (cited in Lever, 2011: 58). Prior to the propagation of socialist realism by the Communist Party in the late thirties, Prichard had already built her works by depicting the working classes’ struggle against oppression. For instance, *Coonardoo* and *Working Bullocks* were published long before her involvement in the Communist Party. Lever asserts that the novels denote “a committed communist’s attempt to develop a technique for expressing political beliefs while responding to Australian material conditions” and are “undeniably the work of a woman whose

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<sup>8</sup> Hay, John. ‘Prichard, Katharine Susannah (1883-1969)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography’, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/prichard-katharine-susannah-8112>, accessed 1 December 2011.

perspective insists on examination of the relations between men and women, and an understanding of women's position in those relations" (2011: 58).

There are some other early influences on her socialist realist writing technique. Bird reveals that Prichard's writing published in *New Idea* when she was twenty years old shows her belief that "fiction should always be true to its sources" (2000: ix). As Prichard claims:

... a writer must deal honestly with his or her subject. Tell others about it, as the conditions in reality demand. Otherwise the story will be betrayed: lose its innate virtue (in Throssel, 1988: xv).

As with Pramoedya, Prichard admits that considering literary work merely as "art for art's sake" or as a means of self-expression" will not be enough (in Throssel, 1988: xix). Both of them share similar aims in their work: understanding a shared humanity or essential human values as well as the purpose of existence (Throssel, 1988: xvi; Teeuw, 1997: 259).

Hence, it is not surprising if in Prichard's writings the four principles of Socialist Realism – party-ness (*partinost*), topicality (*ideynost*), people-ness (*narodnost*), and class-ness (*klassovost*) – are obviously revealed.

... all of her [Prichard's] novels after *Windlestraws* are set (almost) entirely within Australia and display a sense of the national character, hence satisfying the demands of *narodnost*. All are populated with working people and are concerned with the lives of the working classes (*klassovost*), and many applaud the actions of a proletarian or socialist hero. All are committed, to some extent, to a progressive and in some cases radical ethos of social reform (*ideynost*). It is the one remaining component of Socialist Realism, *partinost*, which proved to have such a profoundly significant impact on these later novels. ... By including *partinost* in her work Prichard was, in effect, employing a new narrative strategy (Ellis, 2003: 204).

Besides the *Goldfields Trilogy*, Prichard wrote journal articles reflecting these objectives such as 'Overheard in a bus' (anonymous date and place of publication), 'The march from Frankland River' (1938), 'Our future rests on

Socialism' (1943), Literary culture in the Soviet Union' (1935), 'Communists are always young' (1959), and 'The Swop' (1932) (Bird, 2000: 136-137).

Unfortunately, details of Prichard's personal life are fewer than those on Pramoedya's. If Pramoedya was forcibly kept from the public eye, Prichard chose not to attract public attention, at least in her private life. She seemed reluctant to reveal herself "in public confession of all the intimate details of her personal life" (Throssell, 1975: ix). Unlike Pramoedya, whose unfinished works were destroyed by the Indonesian government, "Prichard's belief in the appropriateness of personal anonymity" made her to burn "all her drafts and corrected manuscripts" (Bird, 2000: xi).

Prichard did write her autobiography, *Child of the Hurricane* (1964), yet, as Catherine Duncan says, Prichard only recorded the less significant events of her life. Duncan continues: "The essential experience had to be exposed indirectly, never in a personal form. We can know much more about her by reading the novels than *Child of the Hurricane*" (in Throssell, 1975: ix). In his foreword to *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers* (1975), Ric Throssell, Prichard's son who wrote a biography of his mother, revealed Prichard's insistence on destroying all unfinished work and her private letters so that "only completed work would become public and her private life would remain private", despite the efforts of her friends who tried to persuade her not to destroy the manuscripts since they would be "preserved for historical and literary research" (x-xi). She did not want anything related to her that she had not approved to be published after her death (Tony Thomas in Bird, 2000: xi).

### **Authors' work**

In their writing, Pramoedya and Prichard are often inspired by the social conditions that they observe or experience around them. However, Pramoedya



has more works reflecting his life than Prichard does. For example, *Bukan Pasar Malam* ('It is not An All Night Fair', 1951) <sup>9</sup> and *Cerita dari Blora* ('Stories from Blora', 1952) consisting of *Yang Sudah Hilang* ('Things that Disappeared'), *Yang Menyewakan Diri* ('The Hirelings'), *Kemudian Lahirlah Dia* ('Then He was Born'), and many more depict the writer's "childhood memories [which are] made into literature" (Teeuw, 1986: 174).<sup>10</sup> In contrast, since Prichard did not want her life to become the object of literary research, *The Wild Oats of Han* – telling the story of her childhood in Tasmania – is her only autobiographical novel in the strictest sense of the word. Her works mostly depict the life of Aboriginal people that she personally observed on the frontier. For Prichard, there was more important work to be done than dealing with the stories of her life (Throssell, 1975: x). Like Pramoedya, who wrote his memoirs in *Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu* part I and part II (*The Mute's Soliloquy*, 1995 and 1997), Prichard also wrote her autobiography, *Child of the Hurricane*, which was supposed to be in two parts. Yet, Throssell says that it is "her reluctant autobiography", since after her husband's death, she was unwilling to spend time continuing the second part of it (1975: x).

As a result, there is limited information about Prichard, though we do have twenty-four published volumes of her work comprising novels, short stories, poems, plays, as well as the translations of the major novels and stories into at least fifteen foreign languages.<sup>11</sup> She also wrote reportage, 'The Real Russia' (1934); a children's story *Maggie and Her Circus Pony* (1967); pamphlets such as 'The New Order'

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<sup>9</sup> Translated from the Indonesian by C.W. Watson, 2001, Equinox Publishing, Jakarta

<sup>10</sup> The English translation of the titles of Pramoedya's novels is taken from Teeuw, A 1986 *Modern Indonesian Literature I*, Foris Publications, Dordrecht – Holland/Riverton – U.S.A.

<sup>11</sup> Some of them were listed in Throssell's *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers* (1975: 263) such as Chinese, Czech, German, Polish, and Russian. It is acknowledged that Chinese and Russian are languages of the countries that have communist system, the political interest of Prichard.

(1919) and ‘Who Wants War?’ (1936), as well as articles: ‘Australia’ (1936) and ‘Creative labour and culture’ (1945) (Throssell, 1975: 262-265). Among her novels are *The Pioneers* (1915), *Working Bullocks* (1926), *Coonardoo* (1928), *Intimate Strangers* (1937), her trilogy *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948) and *Winged Seeds* (1950), and many more. Her short stories include *Kiss on the Lips and Other Stories* (1932), *Potch and Colour* (1944), *Happiness* (1967) and *Wild Honey* (1917). She has two poetry collections: *Clovelly Verses* (1913) and *The Earth Lover and Other Verses* (1932). Her fiction and non-fiction works have provided the source for many critics and commentators investigating Prichard’s life (Bird, 2000: ix).

In contrast to Pramoedya’s *The Girl* which had a rather positive feedback from the readers, Prichard’s *Coonardoo* aroused controversy among literary critics. Its social realism attracted a number of responses asking about “the validity of the novel’s characterization, the reality of the station life depicted” as well as protesting “the casual sexual relationships between white men and black women which the book revealed” (Throssell, 1975: 54). Mary Gilmore wrote, “[*Coonardoo*] is not merely a journalistic description of station life, it is vulgar and dirty” (cited in Throssell, 1975: 54). Cecil Mann, one of the juries in the competition, said that Prichard’s effort to depict Aboriginal women in such a way “cannot excite any higher feeling than nauseated pity or comical contempt” (cited in Throssell, 1975: 54). At the time the book was published, this subject was prohibited. Yet, it was judged the best novel in the *Bulletin* competition in 1928 and was considered as a major achievement by literary critics in Australia, England and America (52-54). The controversy around *Coonardoo* caused the *Bulletin* to refuse printing Vance Palmer’s *Men are Human*, the third winner of the competition and

Norman Lindsay's *Redheap*, which also contains references to sexual relations (Corbould, 1999: 415). Prichard herself was uneasy about this controversy and in her introduction to the first edition of the novel she explained that the characters in *Coonardoo* are not the real people in the Turee station, and that the character of Hugh was an invention and that Coonardoo was more a symbol of the land rather than a real individual (Throssell, 1975: 54-56).

If we cannot be certain about finding actual biographical details in the fiction, we can, nonetheless, discover general correspondences between the fiction and known interests of the authors. The following sections explore, in particular, the authors' shared concerns about postcolonial, political and feminist issues. Postcolonial and feminist perspectives have the same focus of interest, namely power structures and resistance to them.

Indeed, Ashcroft *et al.* (1998: 101) state that one of the reasons why postcolonial discourse and feminism can be examined together is that "both patriarchy and imperialism are forms of domination over those they render subordinate." They have in mind and draw on feminist and postcolonial politics to examine that dominance: "The texts of these theories concur in many similar aspects, for instance, theory of identity, of difference and of the interpellation of the subject by a dominant discourse, as well as offering to each other various strategies of resistance to such controls" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 102). Similarly, in her book *Along the Faultlines*, Susan Sheridan states that postcolonial feminist analysis centres "on the faultlines where tensions and collusions between 'sex', 'race', and 'nation' become visible" (1995: 169). My own work will seek to be aware of the experience of women as doubly colonised subjects and to analyse how postcolonial and feminist interests differently modify each other in each

writer's text.

### **Political alignment**

One characteristic of Pramoedya's and Prichard's writings is more or less transparent attempt to offer an ideological message is closely related to their shared political idealisms centred around communism as well as socialist realist technique of writing. As a literary method, socialist realism had become the doctrine of the left-wing writers who believed that artists have a responsibility to portray the struggle of working-class people (Lever, 2011: 58). As members of the intellectual class, writers had a duty to work on behalf of the working classes. Moreover, Liu argues that both of the authors were intensely stimulated by their insight of cultural doctrines and practices of communism in China and Russia respectively (Liu, 1996: 139; Bird, 2000: xiii). Pramoedya moved his political and cultural outlook to the Left after his visit to China in 1956; whilst, Prichard's communism was influenced by the Russian revolution in 1917 (Liu, 1996: 137; Lever, 2011: 58).

Socialist realism is an aesthetic derived from derived as political policy. Developed in Russia and spread into other Communist countries as a means to implement Marxist doctrines. For J.A. Cuddon, this artistic credo or indeed method of literary criticism "requires art to promote the cause of the socialist society and looks upon the artist (whatever his medium) as a kind of servant of the state, or in Stalin's emetic phrase, as 'the engineer of human souls'" (1998: 837). The phrase means "..., in the first place, to know life in order to depict it truthfully in works of art, to depict it not scholastically, not lifelessly, not simply as 'objective reality', but to depict actuality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic description must be combined with the task of

the ideological transformation and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism” (Andrey Zhdanov in Ellis, 2011: 39).

Hence critics often comment on the static characters in Pramoedya’s works, since they do not seem like real individuals. His politics influences the way he depicts his characters which seem to be the vehicle of his politics. As Teeuw says, Pramoedya “has a sometimes annoying habit of nicely rounding off his stories which according to my taste seems to be in conflict with the realism of his style and themes. His characters are mostly too ‘flat’ and static, his style is sometimes exaggerated and vociferous, especially in the dialogues” (1986: 179). Commenting specifically on *The Girl*, Nell Freudenberger (2002), an American novelist and book reviewer, found a similar pattern in the main character of *The Girl*. He says that *The Girl* has some problems covering “the language, characterization and plotting that are too well defined, as if the author’s desire to communicate the message [strangled creative invention]”, and thus, it weighs down Pramoedya’s masterpiece. He further states, “Pramoedya’s heroine is almost entirely without fault; her ‘quick mind and apparent skill at most anything she set out to do’ allow her to adapt to her new surroundings, and her inborn beauty and talent, despite her humble origins, make her more fairy-tale princess than village girl”.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Pramoedya’s awareness of social injustice, human rights, politics, degradation of humanity, raising human dignity, as well as struggle of women living under the injustice system of society all are a mark of his writings (Teeuw, 1997; Kurniawan, 2002; Manuaba, 2003; Isak in Toer, 1999). His concern for oppressed people and for history became even more apparent when in 1959 he was associated

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<sup>12</sup> Freudenberger, Nell. 2002 ‘A practice wife’s story’, accessed 30 June 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/11/books/a-practice-wife-s-story.html?pagewanted=3&src=pm>

with *Lekra* (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*), the Stalinist-influenced People's Cultural Association, an organization that was initiated by some socialist realist writers (Samuels in Toer, 1999, xvi; Kurniawan, 2002: 91; English, 2003). As we saw, since some of the founding fathers of *Lekra*, such as D.N. Aidit and Njoto, also belonged to the Communist Party, this organization and Pramoedya too were seen as communist, though not all the members of *Lekra* belonged to the Communist Party (Kurniawan, 2002: 89-91), and Pramoedya never declared himself a Communist (Samuels in Toer, 1999: xvi). However, after his short visit to China in 1956, Pramoedya's vision became that of *Lekra* and of the Communist Party, regarding culture as inseparable from society and politics. Literature is seen as part of politics and becomes a form of political propaganda. The motto, "politics is in command", characterized the work of art in *Lekra* (Kurniawan, 2002: 93; Heinschke, 1996: 147).

After the clashes, the Indonesian government tried hard to silence Pramoedya. In 1980, the government officially banned his works such as the *Buru Tetralogy* accusing them of containing Marxist theories and being the work of an *ex-tapol* (*tahanan politik*) or an ex-political prisoner. The publication of *The Girl* in book form in 1987 was also banned (Hellwig, 1994: 71). Ironically, the negative publicity in Indonesia made the work even more popular, nationally and internationally; as noted above, Pramoedya gained ever greater fame overseas. Even though the books were taken out from circulation, they were still secretly distributed among various groups in Indonesia, and they could still be found in Malaysia (Hellwig, 1994: 71). His works were translated into Dutch, Spain, French, Germany, Chinese language, Japanese, Russian, and Czech. Because of the numerous translations of his work, Pramoedya became the first of the top ten Indonesian authors translated out of Indonesia (Aveling, 2008: 16).

In contrast, Prichard never hid her political ties to communism. Lever asserts that she was “the founding member of the Communist Party of Australia” and “together with Vance Palmer, Xavier Herbert, Eleanor Dark, and many more Australian writers, allied ‘liberal political ideals’ with ‘realist literary approaches’ during the 1930s” (2011: 55, 58). Delys Bird further says that “from the time the news of the Russian Revolution reached Australia, her adherence to Marxism as well as her belief in the eventual achievement of a socialist utopia in Soviet Russia – and ultimately in Australia – never faltered” (2000: xiii). She firstly encountered socialist realism in 1933 during her visit to the Soviet Union (Ellis, 2003: 204) although Buckridge states that “Prichard’s realist techniques were forged before the establishment of an official Communist Party doctrine of socialist realism” (cited in Lever, 2011: 58). Prior to the propagation of socialist realism by the Communist Party in the late thirties, Prichard had already built it into her works by depicting the working classes’ struggle against oppression, a central aspect of literary socialist realism. Both *Coonardoo* and *Working Bullocks* were published long before her involvement in the Communist Party. Lever asserts that the novels denote “a committed communist’s attempt to develop a technique for expressing political beliefs while responding to Australian material conditions” and are “undeniably the work of a woman whose perspective insists on examination of the relations between men and women, and an understanding of women’s position in those relations” (2011: 58). Prichard entered the Australian literary scene when social realism was an established norm in order to accurately portray local landscape and life. She turned it more specifically to depicting the conditions of workers and the oppression of women. She was thus already predisposed towards socialist realism’s agenda to reflect the struggle of the working class people to overcome their subjugation (Lever,

2011: 58). For Prichard, socialism would also bring equality to women (Throssel, 1988: xvii).

Bird reveals that Prichard's writing published in *New Idea* when she was twenty years old shows her belief that "fiction should always be true to its sources" (2000: ix). As Prichard claims:

... a writer must deal honestly with his or her subject. Tell others about it, as the conditions in reality demand. Otherwise the story will be betrayed: lose its innate virtue (in Throssel, 1988: xv).

As with Pramoedya, Prichard admits that considering literary work merely as "art for art's sake" or as a means of self-expression" will not be enough (in Throssel, 1988: xix). Both of them share similar aims in their work: understanding a shared humanity or essential human values as well as the purpose of existence (Throssel, 1988: xvi; Teeuw, 1997: 259).

Hence, it is not surprising if in Prichard's writings the four principles of Socialist Realism, party-ness (*partinost*), topicality (*ideynost*), people-ness (*narodnost*), and class-ness (*klassovost*), are obviously revealed. As Ellis asserts:

... all of her [Prichard's] novels after *Windlestraws* are set (almost) entirely within Australia and display a sense of the national character, hence satisfying the demands of *narodnost*. All are populated with working people and are concerned with the lives of the working classes (*klassovost*), and many applaud the actions of a proletarian or socialist hero. All are committed, to some extent, to a progressive and in some cases radical ethos of social reform (*ideynost*). It is the one remaining component of Socialist Realism, *partinost*, which proved to have such a profoundly significant impact on these later novels. ... By including *partinost* in her work Prichard was, in effect, employing a new narrative strategy (2003: 204).

Two of the Goldfields Trilogy, *Golden Miles* (1948) and *Winged Seeds* (1950), have displayed the influence of "the ideological and political convictions of the CPA (Communist Party of Australia) and its principal guiding force of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union)" (204). Yet, the Socialist Realist critics



criticized one of the Trilogy, *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), for not dealing with the communists or the Communist Party (204). *Coonardoo*, too, was criticized because it did not represent “communist or socialist objectives” (Ellis, 2003: 218). Furthermore, Prichard wrote journal articles reflecting these objectives such as ‘Overheard in a bus’ (anonymous date and place of publication), ‘The march from Frankland River’ (1938), ‘Our future rests on Socialism’ (1943), ‘Literary culture in the Soviet Union’ (1935), ‘Communists are always young’ (1959), and ‘The swop’ (1932) (Bird, 2000: 136-137).

In contrast to Pramoedya’s *The Girl* which has a rather positive feedback from the readers, Prichard’s *Coonardoo* aroused controversy among the literary critics because of its overt treatment of sensitive ideas. Its social realism attracted a number of responses asking about “the validity of the novel’s characterization, the reality of the station life depicted” as well as protesting “the casual sexual relationships between white men and black women which the book revealed” (Throssel, 1975: 54). At the time the book was published, this subject was prohibited. Yet, it became the best novel in the *Bulletin* competition in 1928 and was considered as a major achievement by literary critics in Australia, England and America (52-54). Such endorsement was not unanimous. Mary Gilmore wrote, “What an appalling thing *Coonardoo* is. It is not merely a journalistic description of station life, it is vulgar and dirty” (cited in Throssell, 1975: 54). Cecil Mann, one of the judges in the competition, said that Prichard’s effort to depict Aboriginal women in such a way “cannot excite any higher feeling than nauseated pity or comical contempt” (cited in Throssell, 1975: 54). The controversy around *Coonardoo* caused the *Bulletin* to refuse to print Vance Palmer’s *Men are Human*, the third winner of the competition and Norman Lindsay’s *Redheap*, which also contains next references to sexual

relations (Corbould, 1999: 415). Prichard herself was uneasy about this controversy and in her introduction to the first edition of the novel she explained that the characters in *Coonardoo* are not the real people in the Turee station, and that the character of Hugh was an idealized character and that the character of Coonardoo is more a symbol of the land rather than a real individual (Throssell, 1975: 54-56). In summary, then, while the work of both writers has come to be read as deeply indebted to socialist realism, Pramoedya and Prichard paid a high price as the recipients of some very negative criticism for this commitment.

### **Postcolonial concern**

Both Pramoedya and Prichard lived through colonial periods in their countries which shapes their worldview. As with Pramoedya, who witnessed three changes in power in Indonesia – Dutch colonialism, Japanese occupation and post-colonial Indonesian government (Kurniawan, 2002) – Prichard also lived through the 1980s, Federation, both World War I and World War II, inter-war Depression (Jalland, 2005: 42-1) and the era of international dreams of socialist revolution (Throssell, 1975: xii). World War I, in particular, represented a moment of postcolonial assertion of independent nationalism for white Australians.

Pramoedya's and Prichard's thoughts and texts reflect their experience of living through periods of great historical turmoil and change. A prominent Dutch literary scholar, Teeuw, argues that in his massive literary works, Pramoedya exposed "the course of Indonesian history [as well as his own experience] during the twentieth century" (1997: 253). Teeuw also comments that Pramoedya's works represent the phases of colonialism, revolution, post-colonialism, and neo-colonialism in the history of Indonesia (1997: 253). For example, Pramoedya unveils the struggle of the local nationalists to fight Dutch colonialism in *A Heap of*

*Ashes* (1975) and the resistance movement against the Japanese in *The Fugitive* (1975). During the first two decades of Indonesian independence from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, he established himself as the country's leading prose writer, the celebrated voice of revolutionary nationalism in literature and culture (GoGwilt, 2003: 217). Thus, he has long been recognized as Indonesia's most significant literary voice.

Similarly, Prichard, who received the *Bulletin* prize for *Coonardoo* in 1928, was regarded as one of the pre-eminent cultural figures in the early twentieth century of Australia (Bode, 2008: 444). Sheridan asserts that Prichard together with Henry Handel Richardson, Miles Franklin, M. Barnard Eldershaw and Jean Devanny was regarded:

... as [a] serious writer with a social responsibility to national cultural development and the defence of freedom of expression. They regarded their writing as an art that required constant attention and reshaping to fit the new requirements that social change made of it. European literary modernist techniques were adapted to the requirements of social realism – and the romantic and comic traditions of popular entertainment were mostly bypassed in the process (cited in Bode, 2008: 443-4).

As stated earlier, even though Pramoedya and Prichard have similar experiences of living in colonised countries, their position in contemporary postcolonial studies is different. Pramoedya has a “serious disability” in qualifying as a postcolonial writer because he spent most of his time in Indonesia (Roosa and Ratih, 2011: 2681). He fails to fulfil what Said proposed for a “postcolonial intellectual”: that he should have experience living in the west to make “the voyage in” (*ibid*). Indeed, postcolonial studies have never been popular in the Netherlands because of “its reluctance to deal with its colonial past and especially, ..., with Indonesia's battle for independence in the late 1940s, an event that has left scars in the Dutch national historical memory” (Niekerk, 2003:

62).

Teeuw has argued:

Among the literatures in those countries formerly colonised by Western powers, the Indonesian situation is fairly exceptional. In contrast to what happened in the English-speaking and French-speaking nations, in Indonesia the language of the former coloniser has never been employed by young writers as a vehicle for modern literature. Right from the beginning they expressed themselves in what they called *bahasa Indonesia*, the Indonesian national language, which is in fact a new manifestation of the Malay language, one among hundreds of ethnic languages in the Archipelago. It is true that most of these writers, at least of the first few generations, had been educated in Dutch, but their education had not familiarized them with the great literary traditions in the west (1997: 252).

So, while Prichard, who writes in the English of Australia's colonial power, is considered within the field of postcolonial literary criticism, Pramoedya's writing in *bahasa Indonesia*, has generally been discussed within Asian studies or Third World writing rubrics. The cultural dynamics of becoming an Indonesian writer were different to those of becoming an Australian writer. The young Indonesian writers:

... never felt the urge to struggle free from the overwhelming dominance of the Western canon, from Shakespeare and Racine to James Joyce and Beckett, in order to gain their own creative freedom. During the latter days of the colonial period they wrote novels about the social problems of the younger generation which wanted to liberate itself from the fetters of *adat* and tradition, or expressed their romantic feelings in sonnets and other poems, without caring too much about their position with respect to international literature. After the proclamation of the Indonesian Republic in the second half of the 1940s, when they started to write in a new vein, their main concern was how to give vent to their individual, social, and political involvement in the national struggle for independence. Most of them were not familiar with world literature, for want of knowledge of European language as well as because they had no access to the relevant materials (Teeuw, 1997: 252).

Australian writers, by contrast, attempt to write against being 'second-class' Europeans, expressing a cultural cringe, a phrase introduced by A.A. Philips referring to "a tendency to make needless comparison" between English of the

Australians and Englishmen” (1980: 113). English literature “normally frames [their] communication for the Australian reader” (1980: 113). *Coonardoo* is one of the novels seen to be not “quite right to an English reader” because the author employs Aboriginal expression and songs (1980: 113). Upon her return to Australia after spending years trying to win some recognition as a writer in London (Prichard, 1974: 111), Prichard “decided that her work in future was to know the Australian people and interpret them to themselves” (Henrietta Frances Drake-Brockman in Throssel, 1988: xii).

Living under Dutch occupation for such a long time, to some extent, might shape Pramoedya’s viewpoint. Keith Foulcher states that “we see him dealing with a wide range of foreign influences, especially from the West, and writing prolifically as he works through a kaleidoscope of ideas and approaches the realities of life as a creative writer in a postcolonial nation” (2008: 2). Thus, Pramoedya’s works, particularly those written in the early 1950s (middle period), show a postcolonial element, providing us with a frame in which to compare these two writers. The theme of the failure of the revolution or “independence in the colonial residue” – the corruption of the new Indonesian middle class – portrayed “the links between class, colonialism, and the national bourgeoisie in a way that moves the direction of a postcolonial critique” (168). Foulcher also argues that “Pramoedya’s new definition of the nation turned out to be one that stressed hybridity and the negotiation of the marginal condition, even as it remained loyal to the nation and the struggles of its people” (*ibid*).

A number of postcolonial critical studies have addressed his works set under Dutch colonialism. The most remarkable work that is believed to represent Pramoedya’s sense of alienation from the condition of postcoloniality in 1950s

in Indonesia is *SunyiSenyap DiSiang Hidup* ('Silence at Life's Noon', 1956) (Foulcher, 2008; Teeuw, 1986).<sup>13</sup> Teeuw argues:

In this story the writer seems to have reached a stage where he is ready to replace his dreams with action – he has reached this stage because of his embitterment with the world around him, and also because of his disappointment at the futility of his own life, at the failure of his writing and the insufficiency of his humanity. ... He realises that the true battleground is in himself, that it is in him that the battle must be fought between Djakarta and the *desa* [village], between East and West, and he realises that nowhere can he be at ease, nowhere can he be happy, nowhere can he be himself" (1986: 178).

Another instance is *Cerita dari Jakarta* ('Stories from Jakarta', 1957) which contains some stories that represent "the ironic parody of the 'Indo mentality' and the cruel self-centredness of the 'new *priyayi*'" (Foulcher, 2008: 4). One of the stories is *Menggelinging I* ('On the Roll I'), written when Pramoedya became "the old ex-guerrilla fighter working on behalf of the Republic in Dutch-occupied Jakarta", portraying "the betrayal of the Indonesian people by their leaders", a situation that he calls 'a failed revolution for national independence' (*ibid*). Other stories criticizing the failure of the postcolonial Indonesian government in responding to the people's need after independence is depicted in 'Si Pandir' (1947), *Terondol* (1947) and *Kampungku* ('My Kampong' 1952) (Foulcher, 2008: 4-5). *Si Pandir* tells about a revolutionary youth who is called *Si Pandir* (The Dunce) by his teachers for being unable to catch up with the formal education after his guerrilla unit is reorganised. He is demobbed and sent home. Foulcher explains: "The idealism that gave birth to the nation ... finds no reward in the civil society it has helped bring into being" (2008: 5). The second short story tells about a former Dutch East Indies sailor who has learned to fight against colonialism

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<sup>13</sup> The translation of *SunyiSenyap DiSiang Hidup* into *Silence at Life Noon* is found in Teeuw's *Modern Indonesian Literature I* (1986: 178).

through his experiences in Australia returning home to Jakarta to build a new life as a nationalist, not an employee of the Dutch. Yet, until his death, he never gets his job as a *pegawai Republik* (civil servant). Foulcher states that he is “another victim of the nation’s inability to channel the idealism and the will to contribute of its erstwhile defenders” (*ibid*). The story of *Kampungku* shows the irony that occurs in the overcrowded kampongs of Jakarta with the rotten canals located only five hundred meters from the presidential palace. Death happens almost every day in this kampong as the result of poverty, ignorance and poverty. This story like the previous ones highlights Pramoedya’s concern about “the betrayal of revolutionary idealism and the urgency of the need for social change” (Foulcher, 2008: 6). Pramoedya’s narratives represent his characters in ways that reveal them to be complicit in the same prejudices, the same oppressive practices that Indonesians experienced under colonial rule. This is his inscribed ideological position.

Pramoedya’s *Buru Tetralogy* also criticizes how female beauty is employed to signify the male nationalists’s masculinity as the new masters of the independent nation (Saraswati, 2011). In her article “Why beauty matters to postcolonial nation’s masters: Reading narratives of female beauty in Pramoedya’s *Buru tetralogy*”, L. Ayu Saraswati further argues, “beautiful women are objects whose possession will increase the value of a man, and whose possession by colonized men will underwrite the emergence of a masculinized nation” (2011: 120). The older generation of colonised Javanese men gave their daughters to Dutch men, so they were considered to be unable to protect ‘the nation’s most valuable possessions’. Therefore, Saraswati claims that these men would regain their manhood by reclaiming possession of ‘their’ women through sexuality (118) especially “during postcolonial period when the new masters have not yet accrued significant economic capital,

regaining masculinity through access to female beauty seems to be the only means that is readily and traditionally available” (119). Being able to possess two beautiful wives, Annelies Mellema and Ang San Mei, who were desired by every male, strengthened his “dominant ... and leadership-oriented masculinity” for himself, for women, and for other men (119). Saraswati’s viewpoint will be used to investigate a similar circumstance but different context in *The Girl* when an aristocrat male character shows his manliness by marrying beautiful women from the humble origin. These commoners were trained to be the ‘first lady’ and practise the ways of Java’s native elite of which many of them appear to be the hybrid culture of the Dutch colonial ways of life. Having a beautiful and intelligent wife helps to constitute the aristocrat’s manhood.

On the other hand, Prichard’s concern with colonial and postcolonial issues is reflected in her fictional and non-fictional writings representing British colonialism and Aboriginal people in Australia. In the foreword of her *New Deal for the Aborigines*, Prichard asserts:

Most Australians are conscious of shame in connection with our treatment of the Aborigines. Stories of atrocities committed by pioneering settlers against the native race have aroused horror and condemnation. But the conditions in which remnants of the Aboriginal race are now living remain a matter for shame – and we do nothing about it. Despite commissions of inquiry and conferences of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal authorities, little has been done to give the original inhabitants something like a fair deal in their own land (in Bird, 2000: 57).

Through this foreword, she also acts “as a spokesperson on Aboriginal rights and the role of sections of the Labour Party and the Unions at the time protesting the treatment of Aboriginal people” (Bird, 2000: xxi). At the time “neither Australia nor Australian literature was interested in the Aborigines” (Healy, 1968: 242). Vance Palmer even claims that “if a change has come over our attitude to the Aborigines it is largely due to the way Katharine Prichard has brought them near to



us” (cited in Bird, 2000: xx).

In writing about the lives of Indigenous Australians, Prichard tried to obtain first-hand knowledge. For instance, she conducted observations at Turee Station for more than two months in 1926 which became the source for her major works published in 1927, such as *Brumby Innes*, *Coonardoo*, ‘The Cooboo’ and ‘Happiness’ (Bird, 2000: xx). J.J. Healy says that “she was the first serious Southern writer of this century [20<sup>th</sup> century] to do this” (1968: 301). In the outback, Healy asserts that Prichard “was overwhelmed by new worlds, sought to know the truth about that primary world, and did so by turning away her attention from its reality and directing it toward literature as a finite province of meaning” (1989: 142). Before publishing *Coonardoo*, she also asked Ernest Mitchell, a Chief Inspector of Aborigines for Western Australia, to read and correct the script (Prichard, 1975: v). Prichard also gained materials for her stories through some anthropological sources (Prichard, 1975; Bird, 2000). Her other works dealing with Aboriginal themes are ‘The Elopment’ (1959), ‘Marlene’ (1944), ‘Naninja and Janey’ (1952), ‘N’Goola’ (1959), and *New Deal for the Aborigines* (1944) (Bird, 2000: 2, 220).

However, being a settler may have limited Prichard’s ability to champion the Aboriginal cause. Along with the praise from some commentators about her bravery in addressing the controversial issues in her writings, she also attracted criticisms for her depiction of Aboriginal people in her texts. For instance, Henrietta Drake-Brockman saw Prichard as “a mature writer with an excessive innocence of Aboriginal Australia” (cited in Healy, 1989: 141). Prichard’s play, *Brumby Innes*, too, was performed in 1972, a few years after her death, with the speculation that for a long time “its ruthlessly honest depiction of the white man’s callousness

and sexual exploitation of the Aboriginals was too dangerous for a commercial management to touch” (Margaret Williams cited in Bird, 2000: xxi). Critics also highlight Prichard’s “speculation in *Child of the Hurricane* that some causal relation existed between her having a Fijian nurse, N’Gardo, as a baby and a claimed empathy with Aborigines in her adult life as part of sentimental appropriation of black issues” (Bird, 2000: xxi). Bird also argues that “Prichard’s assumption that Aboriginal people can be ‘spoken for’ by whites [shows the] sentimentalised racial politics in her work” (*ibid*).

Similarly to Pramoedya’s, Prichard’s writings dealing with ‘racial politics’ often led to controversy. The central themes of “miscegenation and the European colonisation of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal women” were considered taboo at that time (Bird, 2000: xx). Sheridan argues that despite her sympathetic position on the condition of Indigenous people, Prichard’s writing represents “ambiguously idealised otherness that seems only to confirm their doom as people” (1995: 135). She believes that *Coonardoo* does not deserve to be called a novel that supports justice for Aborigines, since this novel embodies a ‘justificatory myth’, that is, a “wish-fulfilment about ideal interracial relationships [that] serves to reinforce white claims to ‘own’ the black land” (145). Sheridan continues: “While continuing the theme of [Aborigines] as ‘remnants’ of a dying race”, Prichard is ‘also concerned with the meanings of this ‘race’ and their fate for the whites who supplant them” (135). For Kay Schaffer (Iseman), “Prichard’s sympathy for the Aborigines [was] marred by her view of them as ‘the last remnants of a dying race’” (in Lever, 2011: 58). Adam Shoemaker also states that in *Coonardoo* Prichard shows her “sentimental idealism” (*ibid*).

Regarding the criticisms, Throssell defends his mother by insisting that “the

relatively enlightened racial attitudes of recent years are dependent on the early work in challenging stereotypes of writers such as [Prichard]” (cited in Lever, 2011: 59). For him, *Coonardoo* depicts “a reality forgotten in the [self-congratulatory] enlightenment of the present, and demands a reading in terms of the past from which it speaks” (59). Indeed, Healy claims, “Modern critics of literature are unanimous, however, in regarding *Coonardoo* as a serious starting point for the treatment in fiction of the aborigine as a human being” (1968: 281). Jack Beasley also says that *Coonardoo* is much more than a documentary or journalistic work: “it is an imaginative quest for the truth, a truth that was revealed by recreating the facts as fiction, a novel which is a work of art and a true work of the imagination” (1993: 98). Beasley views Prichard’s stance to express “the revolutionary transformation of Australian society” and to bring “the Aborigines, as people” to public awareness in Australia as substantial (*ibid*). Nettie Palmer, a prominent figure in Australian writing, says that the novel is fascinating in terms of its “vitality and courage”, its “shape and form”, its lyrical movement, as well as its simple form. The author brilliantly depicts Indigenous Australians as individuals in the novel, “not as diagrammatic forms” as seen in many scientists’ writings (1988: 373-377). Besides, Ikin says, “Such even-handedness is the strength of *Coonardoo*, and it is seen to best advantage in the portrayal of the characters. Prichard displays a mellowed acceptance of the fact that her characters are a complex mixture of faults and virtues” (1983: 205). For Julian Croft, the “metaphoric depths to its landscapes and human relationships” is the impressive element from *Coonardoo* (cited in Lever, 1993: 23). Hugh McCrae wrote of “*Coonardoo*: like a woman lying against the heart of her lover” in a letter to Prichard (cited in Throssell, 1975: 53).

Prichard’s concern to be part of the life and work of Australian people, to

write about them and interpret them to themselves as well as to show her abhorrence of social injustice have significantly influenced the way she writes and interprets Aboriginal people in her novels. Despite the above criticisms of *Coonardoo*, being the first serious writer who presents a complete portrait of an Aboriginal woman from childhood to death and who reveals realities considered vulgar at that time, Prichard was a pioneering critic of the oppressive dynamics of colonial/postcolonial relations. However, her colonial background also influences her interpretation of Aboriginal people.

In conclusion, Pramoedya and Prichard's concern with colonial oppression is reflected in many of their works. However, their different backgrounds as 'native' and settler respectively significantly influence their way of representing colonial dynamics in their writings. Prichard's lack of interest in telling her life story is perhaps partly due to a concern with the fact that she does not want her 'white, settler' self to dominate her revolutionary self. In Pramoedya's case, even as a native educated person, he would have been exposed to the force of Dutch colonialism.

### **The general concept of identity**

Understanding the concept of identity is not straightforward, for identity is not a fixed idea. As Stuart Hall suggests, "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1990: 222). Hall defines this as 'cultural identity' which:

... is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. ... It has its histories – and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us a

simple, factual ‘past’, .... It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’ (226).

Hall proposes two different ways of defining ‘cultural identity’. First, it is one premised on a “shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (1990: 223). Appiah shares this idea, identifying Hall’s first definition of ‘cultural identity’ as ‘collective social identities’ that encompass religion, gender, ethnicity, race and sexuality (1994: 150). For Appiah, these identities “provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories” (160) or “notions of how a proper person of that kind behaves”/”modes of behaviour” (159).

Hall’s second definition of ‘cultural identity’ admits that “as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’”. He continues:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past,

which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (1990: 225).

This very process is called ‘identification’, a concept which is “as tricky as, though preferable to, ‘identity’ itself” (Hall and Gay, 1998: 2). It is “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established of this foundation. ... the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process’” (*ibid*). In Appiah’s perspective, identity is not only constructed “through concepts and practices made available ... by religion, school, and state, and mediated to varying degrees by the family” but it is also built up in “dialogue with other people’s understandings” of who somebody is (1994: 154). Similarly, identity for Hall is ‘the meeting point’ of two things: “the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and the processes which produce subjectivities, which constructs us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’” (1998: 5-6).

The latter perspective on ‘identity’ offers a more comprehensive understanding about “the traumatic character of ‘the colonial experience’” (Hall, 1990: 225). The practice of ‘cultural power’ can be observed through the colonised people’s experiences of being “positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representations were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization” (*ibid*). As stated above, colonisation affects many aspects of the colonies’ lives including the ‘shaping’ of the colonised people’s identity. Frantz Fanon asserts, “Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in

its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (1963: 210). The particular past experience will eventually re-shape the identity of the colonised people in the future, since identity is 'an unfinished battle of concepts and practices'. Hall argues that identities are "never unified ...; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions" as well as "subject to radical historicization, and constantly in the process of change and transformation" (1998: 4).

In my reading of *The Girl*, I will analyse the process of the Girl's identity construction as a continuum covering the areas of herself in the past as a villager and a child as well as in the later period as a 'practice wife' and a 'first lady'. This will be compared to the identification process that occurs in *Coonardoo* – how Aboriginal society shapes Coonardoo's identity (her past) as well as how white society positions her as a native other (her later period). The battle of the past and the present of the two characters' identities will also be examined. However, this concept will firstly be related to Katrak and Loomba's examination of women living in patriarchal colonised societies offered by Ketu H Katrak and Ania Loomba.

Apart from Hall's idea of identity, we should remember that we are not usually, and certainly not in the case of Indonesia and Aboriginal Australia, speaking of unified, unitary societies. The Javanese are not the same as Sundanese, Balinese, people from Sulawesi and so forth; Aborigines from Coonardoo's area are not the same as Aborigines from other areas. In other words, the identities of Javanese women in Rembang and Gnarler women in the far north of Western Australia depicted in the texts cannot be seen to represent Indonesian women and

Aboriginal women more generally except as broad literary symbols. Both populations, even both Javanese and Aborigine themselves, are multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.

### **The concept of resistance**

In postcolonial studies, the term resistance is closely aligned with anti-colonialism. Ashcroft *et al.* define resistance thus: “the political struggle of colonized people against the specific ideology and practice of colonialism. Anti-colonialism signifies the point at which the various forms of opposition become articulated as a resistance to the operations of colonialism in political, economic and cultural institutions” (1998: 14). Resistance is not always conducted in a radical way – for example, by using military force. As Ashcroft *et al.* note, “In settler colony situations, resistance at the level of cultural practice may occur before the political importance of such resistance is articulated or perceived” (1998: 17). This study will examine many such subtle, perhaps unrecognised, forms of resistance in the selected novels. Those ‘slippery’ modes of resistance are theorised by Homi K. Bhabha as a complex process of constant negotiation, of acceptance and defiance.

For Bhabha, power relations between coloniser and colonised are fluid, since the oppressor and the oppressed can exert power at different levels and in different ways. Even though the Other is dominated, he or she is not necessarily stripped of all power. Bhabha proposes that even when the oppressed seem silent and tolerant toward oppression, they have ways to resist. Glossing Bhabha’s ideas, Ashcroft *et al.* state that “the complex mix of attraction and repulsion [characterises] the relationship between coloniser and colonised” (1998: 12). They go on:

The relationship between the colonised and coloniser is ambivalent because the colonised subject is never simply and completely opposed to the coloniser.



Rather than assuming that some colonised subjects are ‘complicit’ and some ‘resistant’, ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. Ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonised subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself as nurturing, at the same time (1998: 13).

They also explain that, “Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be *ambi-valent* or ‘two-powered’” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 12-13). Colonial subjects did not simply receive and accept the colonial values forced upon them but they adapted them to their worldview. This is what Bhabha called ‘mimicry’, a process that involves mimicking as well as mocking as a form of resistance (Bhabha, 1994: 123). In other words, “colonial discourse is compelled to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonisers”, and vice versa (cited in Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 13). Colonial discourse thus produces both ‘sly’ subjects who can mimic (imitate) and *mimic* (subvert) the colonial worldview, at the same time. Colonial subjects will be only a ‘partial’ or ‘incomplete’ presence, a condition described by Bhabha as denoting a subject who is ‘almost the same but not quite’ (1994: 123). Bhabha elaborates: “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce slippage, its excess, its difference” (122). It is “a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (128).

This concept will be applied to reading resistance in the colonised subjects in

the novels. In *Coonardoo*, for example, the main character's ambivalence is constructed from her identity as an Aborigine and her expected role in the settler's worldview. In *The Girl*, this concept will be worked to discover the ambivalence in the main character toward the dominant class values of Javanese aristocrats, both those originating from the native culture as well as those adopted from the Dutch culture. In both novels, the subaltern subjects seem to consent to the dominant power's demands, but they actually also resist the dominant system either overtly or silently. This shows that the power equation between the colonised/dominant class and colonisers/subaltern is fluid and interchangeable.

Loomba has pointed out that in Fanon's post-colonial analysis, both the oppressor and the oppressed are men (2002: 163). In a more recent work, Katrak gives us a different perspective by exploring women as the oppressed and the way they resist oppression. She explains that "similar to other general anti-colonial struggles ... women resist bodily oppressions by using strategies and tactics that are often part of women's ways of knowing and acting" (2006: 8). For instance, women resist the sense of exile by using "their female bodies" such as "speech, silence, starvation, or illness" (2). Furthermore, there are some other ways to subvert colonial and patriarchal subjugation. These can range from using 'religious and cultural modes such as possession and magic', to showing 'unwillingness to work, to scheming against masters, burning property, poisoning, running away, open rebellion'. In language, 'using silence' can be as resistant as 'using tongue as the "powerful instrument of attack and defence" (60-63). However, resisting domination is not easy. Katrak notes:

... resistance through strategic uses of their bodies – singing satirical songs, or speaking back even when it meant physical reprisals – required enormous courage. The task of decoding indigenous traditions of female resistance is very important because, when overt defiance of patriarchal structures carried

severe penalties such as social exclusion and exile from community, and even death, women creatively invented covert means with which to resist. The goal was survival (58).

I will use these ideas to show similar patterns of female colonial resistance and also some of the different strategies resulting from the different circumstances of each woman.

Rosalind O'Hanlon asserts that in colonial and patriarchal settings "women who broke the code of silence and subservience became the objects of extreme hostility, which, in some cases, succeeded in silencing outspoken women (cited in Loomba, 2002: 223). Colonialism and patriarchy work hand in hand. As Loomba explains: "... despite their other differences, and ... their contests over native women, colonial and indigenous patriarchies often collaborated to keep women 'in their place'. ... They do remind us that women are not just a vocabulary in which colonial and colonized men work out their relations with each other but at least half of the population of any nation" (2002: 222). In Pramodya's and Prichard's female characters in the novels often are subject to physical attacks on their bodies after 'disobeying' traditions (Katrak, 2006: 159).

### **The concept of subalternity**

If colonialism and patriarchy combine to doubly oppress native women, then how do native women resist and how can we know of this resistance if they are silenced by hegemonic power? This is the problem that Spivak addresses when quoting Marx. She notes that proletarian revolution requires the intermediary agency of the intelligentsia (Spivak 1994). The term subaltern, which means 'of inferior rank', was initially adopted by Gramsci in 'Notes on Italian History' (Gramsci, 1971: 1934-5). The subaltern classes refer to "those social groups subjected to the

hegemonic power of the ruling classes”, such as “peasants, workers, and other groups having no access to hegemonic power” (Ding, 2011: 20). Gramsci asserts that the history of subaltern people is as complicated as that of the dominant classes; still, the one that is accepted as the ‘official’ history is the history of the latter. For Gramsci:

The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic since they are always subject to activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel. Clearly they have less access to the means by which they may control their own representation, and less access to cultural and social institutions. Only ‘permanent’ victory (that is, a revolutionary class adjustment) can break that pattern of subordination, and even that does not occur immediately (cited in Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 216).

In my reading of the novels, I will argue that it is obvious that Coonardoo and the Girl in the texts are subaltern subjects. Hence, since the main characters of the novels are depicted as alien or subaltern in their societies, Spivak’s model of subalternity is also used.

The term ‘subalternity’ has been employed in postcolonial studies by the Subaltern Studies group ‘as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way’ (Guha, 1982: vii). The group’s purpose to redress the imbalance between the focus on the elites and on the subaltern is based on the belief that the historiography of nationalism – in this case, in India – has been dominated by an elitist emphasis on the history of victors. This historiography indicates that it is the elites who contribute to the development of a nationalist consciousness – be it British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, culture, elite Indian personalities, activities, institutions or ideas (Guha in Spivak, 1994: 283-4; Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 21). Thus, for Ranajit Guha these texts do not represent the autonomous contribution of the people or ‘autonomous subaltern

consciousness' which is free from the elites' domination, both colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism (Ding, 2011: 20). Guha further categorises the people into three groups: "dominant foreign groups, dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level, and dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels" (cited in Spivak: 284). For Guha, the distinction between the elites and the subaltern is in its 'political mobilization'. The earlier group's political mobilization was gained by adapting the British parliamentary institutions, whilst the latter group "relied on the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or class association" (cited in Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 218).

In her work Spivak argues that "the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous [and therefore] practical historiographic exigencies will not allow such endorsements to privilege subaltern consciousness" (1994: 284). She comments:

For the true subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. ... How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (285)

Therefore, it is apparent that "no one can construct the category of the subaltern as a clear and unproblematic voice that does not simultaneously occupy many other possible speaking positions" (Ding, 2011: 20). In *The Spivak Reader*, Spivak further argues that "it is only the texts of counterinsurgency or elite documentation that gives us the news of the consciousness of the subaltern" (1996: 203).

In the novels, both Pramodnya and Prichard can be regarded as the intellectuals who try to represent the subaltern people – doubly colonised women in

particular. Because of their separation from their subjects, some critics have asserted that ‘white prejudice’ remains visible in Prichard’s *Coonardoo*, while others wonder to what extent that Pramodya, as a male writer from a middle-class background, can truly represent the voice of subaltern women. Following Spivak’s discussion of how hegemonic discourse excludes the voice of the subaltern unless it is mediated by someone within the purview of the state (thereby turning it into something other than genuine subaltern expression), we can see the Girl as only ‘speaking’ through Pramodya’s filtering text (Spivak 1996: 212; Spivak, 1990: 158). The word ‘representation’ for Spivak has two meanings: ‘speaking for’ (*vertreten*) and re-presentation (*darstellen*) (Spivak, 1994: 289). Considering subaltern people as “autonomous subject is mistaken as a transparent expression of their desire and power” (Ding, 2011: 21). Indeed, “no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject entirely separated from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 219). In this thesis, this concept will be used to examine how Prichard and Pramodya represent marginalised groups such as Indigenous Australians and Javanese lower-class people so that their voices can be heard. But drawing on Spivak’s work will allow me to examine also some of the ways in which characters such as those of the Girl and *Coonardoo*, but also mBok, can on occasion articulate their own acts of self-representation. Although at one level always the product of the intellectual’s consciousness – in the present cases Pramodya’s and Prichard’s – such characters offer us also glimpses into acts of agency that speak aptly of a subalternity outside the dominant ideological paradigms.

## Gender awareness

As previously mentioned, Pramoedya and Prichard frequently respond to gender awareness in their work. Women's issues in their work often deal with women's position in the society, women's emancipation, social construction of women's role, and many more. However, the gender issues in Pramoedya's corpus are not as central as in Prichard's texts. Prichard's interest in voicing gender injustice has never been in doubt even though some critics dissent from this view with reference to *Coonardoo*.

A survey of Pramoedya's major works shows that themes of women's struggles do not appear as consistently as that of Indonesian nationalism. Indeed Teeuw asserts that, "Indonesian nationalism is the ideology underpinning practically all of Pramoedya's literary work, ..." (1997: 254). Nevertheless, Teeuw also suggests that women have played a significant role both actively and passively since the early stage of Pramoedya's writings (1997: 261). Instances of supporting female characters who uphold the humanist standards in his writings such as purity, sincerity, simplicity, and honesty, include Ningsih in *Perburuan* (*The Fugitive*, 1950), Nanny (a Eurasian girl) in *Di Tepi Kali Bekasi* (*On the Bank of Bekasi River*, 1951), the wife of the corruptor in *Korupsi* ('Corruption', 1954), the French wife of Pangemanan in *Rumah Kaca* (*House of Glass*, 1988), and Idayu in *Arus Balik* (*The Turn of the Tide*, 1995) (Teeuw, 1997: 261). In addition, Pramoedya depicts women suffering discrimination and violence at the hands of men. These victims of a man-dominated world are Sri and Diah in *Dia Yang Menyerah* ('They Who Surrender', 1951), the daughters of the guerrilla family in Jakarta in *Keluarga Gerilya* (*Guerrilla Family*, 1950), and Midah in *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* ('Midah, The Girl with the Golden Tooth', 1954). All of these characters show a similar

acceptance of the misery in their lives (Teeuw, 1997: 261-2).

Two major female characters in Pramoedya's work need particular consideration, *Nyai Ontosoroh* in *This Earth of Mankind* (1980) and *Gadis Pantai* (the Girl) in *The Girl* (1982). Pramoedya creates the two strong characters who struggle to reveal gender discrimination and to show how women cope with their double oppression under patriarchal colonial society. Teeuw claims that both the Girl and *Nyai Ontosoroh* are outstanding and fascinating women characters, despite ultimately suffering unhappy fates. In the first novel, Pramoedya depicts the struggle of *Nyai*, the concubine of a Dutch man, a woman who belongs neither in the native culture, nor in the colonised culture, whilst, in the second novel, Pramoedya shows the struggle of a Javanese girl from a north coast village, a commoner and concubine of a Javanese nobleman, to subvert the aristocratic values in colonial society. Through the figure of the concubine, these novels, for Hellwig, depict "the sexual politics and power relationships on various levels of the period around 1900" (1994: 93). Teeuw asserts that being symbols, victims or fighters in their own way, all the female characters in these texts represent the author's nationalist ideologies of "freedom, equality, justice" (1997: 263). Barbara Hatley asserts that Pramoedya's female characters confront:

... dominant gender ideology. Where women figures in mainstream literary works embody notions of cultural continuity and conservative social values, Pramudya [sic] ... depict[s] female characters of a contrasting type with opposing political suggestion. These women arguably recall age-old images of independent, assertive female power, but here with implications which are positive, even heroic, rather than threatening. Rather than marginalising them from the national domain, exclusion of such women from traditional structures of political control instead frees them to represent possibilities of a new, transformed Indonesian polity. The stereotypical association of women with nature, nurture, and "tradition" as well as their exclusion from the domain of politics and nation is boldly challenged (in Bahari, 2007: 126).

Correspondingly, there are two major ideologies reflected in Pramoedya's



writings which, according to Teeuw, have jeopardized ‘the nationalism of young Indonesians fighting for the future of their country’ – colonialism and Javanism (Teeuw, 1997: 258). In his essay ‘Maaf atas Nama Pengalaman’ (‘My apologies in the name of experience’, 1992), Pramoedya scorns the Javanese feudalistic view:

In 3 ½ centuries of colonisation, my ethnic group’s power never once prevailed against European power, not in any field, but especially not militarily. The poets and writers of Java, being some of those who think and imagine within the framework of kampong civilization and culture, flaunt the superiority of Java: that in facing the Dutch and Europe, Java never lost. The masturbatory stories that are staged and written, and even the stories spread by word of mouth, constitute one of the reasons I always ask: why does my ethnic group not want to face reality? (Pramoedya in Shohifullah, 2001: 100)

Gender inequality or patriarchy is a parallel form of colonial oppression. Loomba asserts that “race and gender ... remain mutually intensifying” (2002: 166). Colonialism strengthens women’s subordination and patriarchal relations in colonial lands (Loomba, 2002: 167). Hence Hellwig concludes that by employing the notions of colonialism and patriarchy in these novels, Pramoedya stresses how “repressive mechanisms did not only exist just as a result of colonialism, but on all levels of the Javanese social structure” (1994: 94).

For Pramoedya, the national heroine, R.A. Kartini, as a pioneer in the struggle for women’s rights and as a model mother, embodies both nationalist and feminist struggles. As a biographer of Kartini, in *The Girl* Pramoedya draws on the figure of Kartini to create a character who serves as “a foil and as a potential role model for the Girl and her descendants” (Aveling in Pramoedya, 1991: x). In the Introduction to *The Girl*, Aveling reveals that Pramoedya had a high regard for Kartini because of her bravery in standing up to the Dutch that made the Dutch and Javanese aristocrats respect her (ix-x).

As mentioned above, despite the government’s banning, the response of readers to *The Girl* was mostly positive. The blacklisted-book was welcomed in

Malaysia (Hellwig, 1994: 71) and Aveling and Willems Samuels translated it into English for a global readership. Because of publishing problems during 1980s, I must rely on non-Indonesian critics who mostly base their readings on the English version of the novel. The following reviews refer to the translation version of Samuels. Andrew O’Hehir (2002), a former editor-in-chief of San Francisco’s *SF Weekly* in the mid-1990s, claims that *The Girl* has similar characteristics to John Steinbeck’s and Leo Tolstoy’s work in which these authors depict “plainspoken, salt- of-the-earth characters, along with some of the same quality of ageless folk tale or instructive moral fable.” Moreover, David Kipen (2002), at the time one of America’s leading book and movie critics, praises the incomplete *The Girl* that “has taken its place in a different, roofless, pantheon, alongside niches for F. Scott Fitzgerald’s unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon*, Franz Schubert’s ‘Unfinished Symphony’, Orson Welles’ movie *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Antoni Gaudi’s incomplete church *La Sagrada Familia*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem *Kublai Khan*, and ABC’s American TV series ‘Sports Night’”.<sup>14</sup>

These responses show appreciation of the work not in terms of socialist realism, but its qualities of fable (though socialist realism is usually a fable of the heroic worker battling evil forces). The fabular quality could lead into a discussion of how the Girl remains a type, and how despite his good intentions, Pramoedya’s primary interest in political and class critique (and perhaps his own position as male writer) leaves his championing of women somewhat lacking in literary realisation: they are tools to make other points.

As with Pramoedya, Prichard frequently focuses on subjugated people,

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<sup>14</sup> Kipen, David 2002 ‘Lonely life of a ‘practice wife’’, accessed 30 June 2011 <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2002/10/06/RV236733.DTL#ixzz1QirZ87Cf>

particularly women. Delys Bird says that, “Although Prichard always believed that the class struggle predominated over sexual politics, she also always supported women’s issues, acknowledging women’s particular social positioning. Although rarely radical, her ideas on women remained in many ways ahead of her time and were not static” (2000: xviii). *Working Bullocks* and *Coonardoo* are two of the works that represent “the relations between men and women, and an understanding of women’s position in those relations” (Lever, 2011: 58). In *Coonardoo*, the author conveys her “passion for social justice and sexual equality” (Magill, 1987: 326). In ‘The Cow’ and ‘Painted Finches’, Prichard depicts “women who do not articulate such views [expressing emancipated attitudes towards female sexuality and women’s intellectual and economics lives], yet their lives are used to convey them. The potential for women’s emancipation, however, is always underlined by a deeply conservative concept of the true role of women, which is maternal and domestic” (Bird, 2000: xix). Frank N. Magill further notes that, “Her political commitment as a Communist, pacifist, and feminist were more fully in evidence in some of her later novels, notably her highly acclaimed gold-mining trilogy” (1987: 326). She was regarded as a feminist writer and “her political commitment and interest in the lives of women has never been in doubt” (Lever, 2011: 58). Beasley also states that Prichard “had a clearly worked out and defined attitude to, and a life long record of participation in, the movements of her time to achieve equal status for women” (1993: 12). Other writings dealing with women’s issues are ‘Genieve’ (1944), ‘The Cow’ (1928), ‘The Grey Horse’ (1932) and her non-fictional work ‘Her Brilliant Career – Miles Franklin’ (Bird, 2000: 96).

However, in *Coonardoo*, if some critics feel ambivalent of Prichard’s commitment to the lives of Indigenous Australians, they also have reservations

about her feminism. Kay Schaffer argues that Prichard's feminism is "limited by her focus on male characters as virile Australians [and that] *Coonardoo* [reiterates] masculine constructions in [its] depiction of the feminine" (58-59). For Bird, Prichard's gender awareness reflected in her work is often contradictory of her own life experience. She argues:

... although she claimed to be 'married with her work', once she was a wife, her husband was dominant in that partnership. The admired women characters in her fiction are depicted as stronger and often more capable than the males, who are weakened by exploitative work or by the struggle against capitalism, but these women's greatest fulfilment is always in motherhood. In contrast are the female characters condemned in the fiction as flirtatious, superficial creatures who are depicted as either spiritless or shrewish when their hollow expectations of being looked after a man are thwarted (2000: xix).

Prichard "never identified herself as a feminist" in the way she confidently claims that she is a communist (Bird, 2000: 96). However, her female characters, whether as heroines or supporting characters, are consistently the "better men" (Drake-Brockman 1967: 10).

Significantly neither Pramoedya nor Prichard claim to be feminist. The gender awareness reflected in their writings shows their concern for the social injustice experienced by marginalised people, including women. Female characters in Pramoedya's novels are depicted as more able to resist colonialism than those in Prichard's novels. This is influenced by the historical background of the novels. In colonial Indonesia, quite often we read the struggle of native heroines against Dutch colonialism. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were a number of women in many parts of Indonesia who "stood up for the right of their people" (Wieringa, 1985: 5). However, since Australia was at the time of *Coonardoo* still tied to attitudes and policies of white colonial supremacy, depicting an indigenous heroine novel would not have been widely accepted.

## **Women in a patriarchal postcolonial society**

The concept of ‘identification’ previously discussed is relevant in analysing the role of the female bodies in the creation of women’s identities in a patriarchal postcolonial society. This statement implies that women’s identities have a past as well as a future and endure relentless transformation. Women are especially “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1990: 225). Katrak speaks of ‘a politics of the female body’, which engages “socialization involving layers and levels of ideological influences, sociocultural and religious, that impose knowledge or ignorance of female bodies and construct women as gendered subject or object” (2006: 9). Loomba also suggests that “... postcolonial identities are not static but shifting” (2002: 226).

Katrak and Loomba designate this position of women as one of ‘double colonisation’ (2006: 1; 2002: 166). According to Loomba, “in this ‘double colonisation’, race and gender categories are not analogous but they remain mutually intensifying” (2002: 166). For Loomba, the coming of colonialism created more pain for women, since it strengthened “women’s subordination” and “patriarchal relations in colonial lands” (167). This occurs “often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the women as emblems of their culture and nationality” (168). Spivak argues too that “clearly, if you are poor, black, and female” you have no history and cannot speak (1994: 294). Thus, combining race and gender discourses or postcolonial and feminist studies allows me to to analyse how Pramodya and Prichard depict women’s double subjugation and how they resist to it.

This concern with the complex ways in which female bodies were colonised

under pre-colonial and colonial societies is especially visible in Katrak's work. As she notes, the "female body is in a state of exile including self-exile and self-censorship, outsidership, and un-belonging to itself within indigenous patriarchy (historicized within different cultures and histories) strengthened by British racialized colonial practices ..." (2006: 2). The female body also experiences 'internalized exile' in which "the body feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it, and has no agency" (*ibid*), a view that resonates with Spivak's comments. The instances of female exile are the product of a "British colonial(ist) education accompanied by racial superiority leading to linguistic and cultural alienations", "the traps of cultural tradition, both colonial and local", "prejudice against lesbians who endure invisibility for fear of violence", as well as of the "pressures of motherhood" (*ibid*). Relevant to the texts in this study are concepts such as "the traps of colonial and local cultural tradition" and "the pressures of motherhood". As stated above, the female body is also politicised. This process involves "the constructions and controls of female sexuality, its acceptable and censored expressions, its location socioculturally, even materially, in postcolonial regions" (8).

Women's identities are informed also by elements such as sexuality. Katrak states that "key controls of female sexuality are located in the arena of 'cultural tradition' particularly when women are expected to be the 'guardians of tradition' in anti-colonial struggles. Further, 'traditions' most oppressive to women are located within the arena of female sexuality" (2006: 11), such as multiple child-bearing, fulfilling traditionally expected roles as daughter, wife, mother, and polygamy (11, 14). Women are regarded as "reproductive units bought and sold through traditions" and even "her body may be prostituted within marriage" (162).

However, “As a mother, her outsidership to patriarchal power is slightly ameliorated, especially if she bears sons who will preserve male authority” (209). *The Girl* and *Coonardoo* show that sons are valued over daughters in both Indonesian and Australian contexts. As I will discuss in detail in chapters three and four, these aspects of oppression are represented in both novels, particularly in the form of polygamy and the patriarchal expectations for women as daughters, wives and mothers.

At times, moreover, colonialism changes the local tradition of marriage. Polygamous marriage that had roots in the local tradition was interrupted by European colonialism that promoted monogamous marriage. Indeed, Loomba has posited that colonialism “often justified its ‘civilizing mission’ by claiming that it was rescuing native women from oppressive patriarchal domination” (2002: 171). Gayatri Spivak has her own expression: “White men are saving brown women [or black women] from brown men [black men]” (cited in Loomba, 2002: 154). However, this interference of the white men in the native culture triggers resistance (Loomba, 2002: 154), as we will see in *Coonardoo* particularly.

Loomba argues also that religion has been used in colonised spaces to enforce women’s subordination, since it “plays a key role in defining these shifts [postcolonial identities]” (2002: 226). By this, Katrak explains, “notions of domesticity were imposed on colonised women [who were educated] to be good wives and mothers, discouraging them from participating in the world ... outside the home” (2006: 73).

Importantly, some negative symbols of female sexuality also determine women’s identity. Helen Carr explains that non-European women

are seen as part of nature, not culture, and ... ambivalence: either they are ripe for government, passive, child-like, unsophisticated, needing leadership

and guidance, described always in terms of lack – no initiative, no intellectual powers, no perseverance; or on the other hand, they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near animal, lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable (cited in Loomba, 2002: 159-160).

For Sander Gilman, “black women are constructed in terms of animals, lesbians and prostitutes. ... The primitive is black, and the qualities of blackness, or at least the black female, are those of the prostitute” (cited in Loomba, 2002: 160). The female body is also symbolized as ‘the conquered land’ (Loomba, 2002: 152). This term shows that the female body becomes the object of both colonial and patriarchal power. These symbols are relevant to how patriarchal colonial society constructs the identity of the Gnarler women in *Coonardoo*.

Women’s alienation or disempowerment is also effected through education, both colonial and local. The purpose of this often is said to be to ‘civilise’ the native women. Having been educated, the native women may be seen as more ‘modern’ than the rest of the ‘backward’ native women who cannot get access to education. This may lead to a modern identity at odds with local established tradition. Katrak asserts, “Even as education equips these female protagonists to think for themselves, that very autonomy ironically separates them from their own communities” (2006: 122). Obtaining education, either in colonial or local perspective, requires stepping out from familiar surrounding into a new environment (124). However, this does not necessarily mean women can get their freedom. In moving away from traditional constraints, the ‘progressive’ woman enters a colonial space in which ‘restrictive codes’ still dictate how they carry themselves or things that they should and should not do (123). Katrak states:

... women’s education enabled them to be better wives and mothers, and most female school curricula emphasized sewing, coking, and childcare. Education was not valued in itself but for its potential to make women better mates while leaving the male social power structure intact. Even when in the



face of deeply entrenched prejudice, women were educated, the content and extent of their learning was controlled (120).

Even though Katrak's and Loomba's theoretical works are particularly addressed to the condition of Third World women, many of their concepts are relevant to the condition of women (especially Aboriginal women) in Australia as well as Indonesia (especially Javanese women).

This chapter has embraced the similarities and differences in the authors' personal background and their shared-vision in postcolonial, feminist and political aspects as well as some theoretical background related to the author's shared-ideas. I argued that even though Pramoedya and Prichard have different positions in postcolonial studies, their works echo their concerns with colonial legacies. Also, although Prichard is more open toward her communist stance than Pramoedya, both their works portray the struggle of working class people. Even though neither of them claims to be feminist, women play important parts in their works. In addition, the general concept of identity and resistance examined in this chapter will allow me to identify identity construction and resistance in Javanese and Aboriginal society in the colonial period represented in the selected texts. Furthermore, the concept of resistance discussed in the following subchapter will enable a close examination of how subordinated women cope with their subjugation.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **JAVANESE AND ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN INDONESIA AND AUSTRALIA**

This chapter discusses the existing stereotypes of Javanese and Aboriginal women in Indonesia and Australia as well as its similarities and differences. This examination is employed in analysing women's representation in *The Girl* and *Coonardoo*.

#### **Images of Indonesian (Javanese) women**

Some critics argue that images of women in Indonesia are derived mostly from Javanese values. As Hellwig asserts, "Javanese culture has [had] a notable impact on the present-day of Indonesian society as whole. For centuries, it has regulated Javanese rural life, and currently it affects the large numbers of Indonesians (including non-Javanese) living in an urban life on Java, modifying the existing gender ideology accordingly" (1994: 198). In other words, Java becomes the most fundamental concern in the study of colonial Indonesia and women under colonialism. Locher-Scholten writes,

Political life in colonial Indonesia was centred in Java; it was the most developed, the most 'colonized' and the most densely populated island in which the largest numbers of Europeans (80%) and the largest numbers of Indonesians (almost 70%) lived. ... Most of the limited source material on Indonesian women – be it on their labour conditions or their organizations – derived from Java. ...women and gender ... in the Java-centric tradition ... colours most of Indonesian historiography (2000: 16).

The Soeharto government formulated "a state ideology concerning the [households] in which the cult of domesticity is a central theme" (Locher-Scholten in Koning *et al.*, 2000: 28). For Hellwig, "the state adheres to values which have their roots partly in Western (Dutch) bourgeois notions" (1994: 14). The

Dutch brought to the East Indies the cult of ‘true womanhood’ which means women’s function is “as a wife and mother and bound within the private sphere of the home” (Locher-Scholten in Koning *et al.*, 2000: 29). Locher-Scholten further notes that “Indonesian educated elite women should follow Western patterns of the modern woman as wife and mother. Not only was education for this group geared to a model of ‘housewifisation’<sup>15</sup>, but ideally women of this class should live in monogamy in order to strengthen family life and provide society with better educated offspring, able to develop as thrifty and trustworthy subjects of the colonial state” (2000: 28).

The Dutch partly forced Western bourgeois morals upon Indonesia, and Indonesian people partly adopted these values. The New Order government overtly framed duties for women in *Panca Dharma Wanita* (women’s five principles), which bore the message that “women’s primary role is in the domestic sphere” (Hellwig, 1994: 14), as “loyal backstop and supporter for her family”, “caretaker of the household”, “producer of future generations”, “the family’s prime socializer”, and “Indonesian citizen” (Sullivan, 1991: 64; Suciwati and Sumardiyati, 2003). This implies that “women should be at home, be responsible for the household and the education and socialization of the children, while men are considered the breadwinners and representatives of the household in the outside world” (Locher- Scholten, 2000: 28). In other words, the husband as the head of the household has ‘status and authority’, whereas the wife’s status is determined by her quality as mother and homemaker – even if she is the

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Housewifisation’ means “motherhood and women’s primary roles within the family” (Suryakusuma cited in Hellwig, 1994: 200); whilst, ‘*ibuism*’ is defined as “the ideology which sanctions any action provided it is taken as a mother who is looking after her family, a group, a class, a company or the state, without demanding power or prestige in return” (Djajadiningrat-Niewenhuis cited in Hellwig, 1994: 200).

breadwinner in the family (Hellwig, 1994: 200).

Locher-Scholten explains that “Javanese ideas of a woman’s proper place were class-bound” (2000: 41). *Adat* (tradition) requires *priyayi* women to be submissive to their husbands and allows polygamy in the *priyayi* circles (32). In contrast, peasant women are depicted as having autonomy and relatively equal responsibility with their husbands. Polygamy was not popular among the rural population, as this practice required some wealth (*ibid*).

Prior to and after colonialism, some religions also supplied “the most fundamental ideas and beliefs about gender differences” (Hellwig, 1994: 198). For example, Hindu-Javanese values authorized polygamy and framed the ideal model of women through the *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre) tradition. Hellwig notes:

Arjuna, an incarnation of the god Wisnu, functions on Java as a male role model. He is refined, shrewd, and attractive, an outstanding example of a womanizer and seducer. Women compete for his love and attention, thus serving as an example for female behavior. The Hindu-Javanese tradition also offers role models for the ideal woman. Kunti, Sumbadra, and Dropadi serve as examples of devoted mothers and faithful wives. Srikandi is a woman warrior figure who represents the side of woman which deviates from the norm (1994: 199).

Similarly, Hellwig continues, “Islam allows men to be polygamous but demands monogamy and premarital virginity from women. ... men can repudiate their wives, but for women it is much more difficult to seek a divorce. Children born out of wedlock and their mothers are condemned, whereas the fathers of such children are not” (198). Even though Christianity does not condone polygamy, it imposes the same sexual requirements on women as does Islam. Hellwig explains: “In most Christian societies, women are penalized more severely for adultery than men. Some Christian creeds prohibit women from having abortions and from using

contraceptives, thus denying them authority over their bodies” (*ibid*).

The coming of Dutch power partly contributed to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Blackwood asserts:

If Islamic beliefs redefined women’s ritual and political participation, Dutch mythologies of gender and sexuality made it much more difficult for native women to step outside the bounds of a new ‘domesticity’. ... Dutch colonisers brought their patriarchal worldview to Indonesia, encouraging a view of gender relations in which women served men as housewives (or concubines) and [childbearers] (Stoler 1991). Dutch policies, as well as Islamicist reactions to them, created a more restrictive environment for women in Indonesia. These policies were not simply received by an inert population; they created a variety of forms of resistance and accommodation throughout the archipelago (see Sears 1996). Their lasting legacy may have been the codification of *adat* [indigenous customs and law] and the creation of a legal system and political structure that laid the foundation for many of the laws of the postcolonial state (2005: 864).

Religious values intermingle with localised customs and law to construct women’s identity in Indonesia. Polygamous marriage was practised by the indigenous rulers of this country such as kings and sultans, as well as by settler Dutch men. For example, Pakubuwana X, Javanese King in Surakarta, had four legal wives and many concubines. Residen van Wijk stated that if one of the concubines got pregnant, one of the wives would be divorced to give space for the concubine. When she had delivered the baby, she would be divorced (in Kuntowijoyo, 2006: 34). Female bodies became the object of men’s sexual politics (Hellwig, 1994: 93). This situation can also be seen in R.A. Kartini’s collection of letters (1976 and 1987) and the life story of Partini (1986); both of them are Javanese *priyayi* (noble) women who experienced polygamous marriage. “Kartini writes how terrible it is to live with two mothers” and “Partini emphasizes how difficult it was for her not to know her real (natural) mother, who had been her father’s *selir* [concubine]” (Hellwig, 1994: 93-94). Polygamy used to be popular too in colonial society since Dutch men in the Dutch East Indies outnumbered

Dutch women. They then had a reason to take *nyai*, native women, to be their wives. *Nyai* usually worked as their housemaids. Many Dutch men were married but could not take their wives because it was difficult to travel from the Netherlands to the Netherlands Indies (Baay, 2008: 1; Hellwig, 2007: 5).

The Dutch colonial government frowned upon polygamy in the *priyayi* household, as it was not considered ideal from moral, social and emotional perspectives. This household model “lacked the conditions to educate a new generation and to introduce them to the desired Western norms of activity, thrift and responsibility” (Locher- Scholten, 2000: 37). Therefore, the Dutch government decided on “Western education for girls [and] defended a stable family through the regulation of rules concerning child marriages, divorce and polygamy or the *selir* [concubine] system” (*ibid*). These decisions met Kartini’s three goals: education for Indonesian women, promoting monogamous marriage, and re-evaluation of Javanese culture (21).

The Dutch settlers spread their values through education. As stated earlier, the Ethical Policy introduced by the Dutch expanded educational possibilities, from a simple rudimentary form for the peasant population to Dutch-language Western schooling for the Indonesian elite. This expansion reached girls’ education as well. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten states that “the literacy rate among Indonesian women increased more rapidly than that of the men between 1920 and 1930” (2000: 19). However, “it was only an achievement of the female elite” (*ibid*), not the common native population in Indonesia.

Feminist critics commonly see Javanese women as subjects of discrimination in Javanese culture which gives no space for gender equality. Javanese people tend to employ the word *wanita* more than *perempuan* as the Indonesian term of

woman. Apart from its Sanskrit origins, *wanita* is often locally understood to be coined from *wani* (brave) and *ditata* (to be ordered/controlled), as it is believed that women promote orderliness (Handayani and Noviyanto, 2004: 24). This denotes women as passive, to be controlled by the world surrounding them, a man-dominated society. Similarly, Damardjati Supadjar, an Indonesian philosopher, defines *wanita* as *wani* (brave) and *tapa* (to suffer). Javanese women bravely sacrifice themselves for the sake of other people, particularly their husbands and children (in Handayani and Novianto, 2004: 24). This implies that they have no control over their bodies and mind, since their action is committed for other people. Hellwig asserts, “Their connectedness to the people around them is precisely what makes them dependent and limits their freedom of movement: they feel responsible for the well-being of others, they take care and nurture, and in doing so, they sacrifice their own needs.” (1994: 201-202). Most feminist critics in Indonesia prefer to use the term *perempuan*, as it bears a better etymological meaning than *wanita*, which is *empu* (teacher). Yet, in the real context, the use of *perempuan* is sometimes inconsistent, for example, to describe whores, the term *perempuan nakal* (whores) is more acceptable than *wanita nakal* (Handayani and Noviyanto, 2004: 24).

Furthermore, the relationship between Javanese men and women is rather complicated. Norma Sullivan argues that:

Javanese society allocates different positions to each sex, but furnishes these positions with equal status. Such positions are based on the different roles and tasks men and women perform in the family. The major roles and tasks ascribed to women focus on household management, nurturance and socialization. Men are identified as the providers, protectors and representatives in non-familial realms and situations (1991: 74).

Sullivan notes, “These ‘natural’ roles and tasks are perceived as unified and

mutually supportive, because oriented towards the same objective: secure and harmonious family life, and ultimately secure and harmonious social life” (*ibid*). There are some other terms attached to women in Javanese culture. Sarlito W Sarwono, an Indonesian psychologist, states that they are commonly called *kanca* (friend) *wingking* (backside) or ‘man’s loyal backstop’ whose spheres are in the domestic life such as *macak*, *manak* and *masak* (dressing/making up, giving birth and cooking) (in Handayani and Novianto, 2004: xi). As stated earlier, their access to the public sphere is limited. Javanese people believe that the term *kanca wingking* exists in the Holy Scripture – of Islam and Christianity – which positions women to be lower than men (118). Moreover, Javanese women are also attributed with the ‘admirable’ qualities of being *sabar* (patient), and *sumarah* (resigned). Hellwig further explains:

... *sumarah* means that they must give up a part of themselves each time. Whatever is done to them, by whoever, they do not protest and do not revolt. Fostering *sumarah* means the reinforcement of existing power patterns. *Sumarah* also means keeping silent, saying nothing. Breaking the silence means death (1994: 144).

There are many other characteristics associated with being an ideal Javanese woman: being soft-spoken, calm, silent, avoiding conflicts, putting emphasis on harmony, upholding family values, being able to understand others, polite, having a high self-control, being able to suffer, having an economic role, and faithful (Handayani and Noviyanto, 2004: 130). These qualities make them physically and mentally strong and able to face any situation without complaining (131). It is also believed that the wife should respect her husband, not positioning herself higher than him. As asserted earlier, Javanese women are not supposed to work in the public sphere, since it will be considered degrading to their husbands’ position (144). A Javanese expression, *swarga nunut neraka katut* means that wherever the



husband will go – be it to paradise or to hell – like it or not, the wife must join him (Sarwono, in Handayani and Noviyanto: xi).

However, in *Kuasa Wanita Jawa* ('The power of Javanese women'), C.S. Handayani and Ardhian Noviyanto also show that behind the constructed stereotypes/images of Javanese women, Javanese women actually have a strong hidden power (2004). They can use their femininity to negotiate men's domination. Anthropologist Koentjaraningrat asserts that: ... the dominance of women and their 'strong position' in family and society was not obvious at a surface level. These realities were 'hidden' in formal contexts, by the acts of women themselves. When women withdrew or retired from such situations they gave the 'erroneous impression' that they had an inferior status vis-à-vis their husbands (cited in Sullivan, 1991: 81).

Rogers also points out that in Javanese culture, men's domination is only at the ideological level, and it is more a myth than reality. On the other hand, women's domination is more practical in the sense that Javanese women, particularly the peasants and merchants, have become accustomed to their double spheres domestically as housewives and publicly as breadwinners (in Handayani and Noviyanto, 2004: 5-6). The 'separate-but-equal' position of men and women is seen in the 'master-manager relationship'. Sullivan states that "with men masters of the dominant public sphere, women remain mere managers of the socially subordinate private-domestic sphere" (1991: 84). This social construction gives them the ability to control stressful situations more strategically and spontaneously than men (Jay in Handayani and Noviyanto: 15). Their ability to endure suffering in silence and to show resignation actually shows their active power to create peace and harmony in life and to avoid conflicts. Javanese concepts of power tend to be

feminine and differ from the Western masculine concept of power. For example, Javanese people believe that the ultimate goal of life is the unity of all beings and god (*manunggaling kawula gusti*) which can only be reached by controlling the outer world and continuously improving the inner world (in Handayani and Noviyanti: 179). Javanese people commonly conduct asceticism which they call *laku tapa*. *Laku tapa* is also intended to remove the quality of being selfish, a masculine quality (179). Denys Lombard states that women in Indonesia have a more powerful position than those in other Asian countries (in Handayani and Noviyanto: 5). However, Sullivan argues, “In terms of their everyday social contributions and their practical capabilities, kampung [*sic*] women are far more ‘the equals’ of men than are their supra-*kampung* sisters, but in a general social sense, they are no less subordinated” (1991: 84-85).

In *The Girl*, the preceding concepts and practices contribute to the construction of the main character’s identity. Some agents of change speak to the Girl and shape her worldview, and how she behaves in certain situations. In the meeting point of ideas and practices, the Girl is constructed as the subject of continuous transformation of the shared – not to say dominant – culture. In the process, what matters is not only how the Girl is positioned by the dominant system, but also how she positions herself within the system. To some extent, some of these concepts and traditions are similar to those practised in Australia.

### **Images of Australian (Aboriginal) women**

Women in Australia share with Indonesian women many forms of gender positioning. In both countries, women have a less significant role in public life. Anne Summers notes that “[Australian] women are thus effectively imprisoned within family and marriage, dependent on men, and nurturing husbands and

children, as their only means of psychic survival”; whilst, “For men, ..., their jobs [the world of work outside the home] are an integral part of their ‘self-identification’”(1980: 96). She further states:

Women are culturally impotent: they are considered to have no culture of their own and are only permitted, at best, an associate status in male (so-called Australian) culture. They are economically dependent: they are prevented from being economically self-sufficient and are forced to depend for subsistence on a husband or, if he reneges, the State. They are the cornerstone of ‘the family’ and are laden with the responsibility for maintaining this institution. They perform an enormous amount of physical and psychological labour within it, but because this is seen as their ‘natural’ role, they are given little recognition or credit for doing so. They are sexually colonized: not even their bodies are their own but are regarded and treated as the property of men. Those English invaders of two centuries ago colonized more than a country and its Aboriginal inhabitants: they also forced all women under their imperial sway (461-2).

Similarly, Norman Mackenzie argues that “Australia is ... ‘a man’s country’ ...” (cited in Dixon, 1976: 21), since “from the preverbal stages of childhood, the ‘once-upon-a-time’ months and years, Australian girls begin to acquire a kind of gut knowledge that they are ‘outsiders’” (*ibid*). In this country, a ‘real’ woman must not display “achievement-drive, initiative, autonomy, true dignity, confidence and courage” (22). Sociologists Sol Encel and Margaret Tebbutt assert that Australia has a ‘masculine flavour of social life’ which encompasses “suspicion, hostility and fear of women who step out of essentially domestic [roles]” (cited in Dixon: 22). Dr. H. C. Coombs, Chancellor of the Australian National University in 1974, even says, “One thing that saddens me about Australian society is that not only is it male-dominated, but ‘male’ values in the form of power, status, force, and greed, are most influential in our society” (cited in Dixon: 23-24).

It is clear from the above quotations that the stereotype of Indonesian women, to some extent, can also be seen as applying to Australian women. Like Javanese women, Australian women also experience resignation. Margaret Myers Beckhart

expresses her impression of this condition: “Many women in Australia seem contented, but much of this is resignation rather than satisfaction ... I have already found a strong undercurrent of bitterness in the tones in which Australian women discuss their men” (cited in Dixon: 26). Another similarity occurs in women’s role as sexual partner. If Javanese culture views women’s role to be to give birth, as captured in the term *manak*, in the Australian context, women are considered only as ‘sexual providers’, “things to sleep with but not to talk to” (Craig McGregor cited in Dixon: 27). In addition, Dixon asserts that religion plays a significant “(if always ambivalent) part in nurturing confident role models for [Australian] women” (179). Summers comments on this situation:

One of the most salient points to emerge from recent radical feminist analyses of women’s position in sexist societies is the extent to which women are oppressed by internal forces, by their low self-esteem and by the images society has constructed of women which are generally demeaning or low status ones and which women have ingested as part of their acculturation to the society in which they live. These internal forces have to be contended with as much as, perhaps even more in some situations, than the more readily identifiable external oppressive forces. It is often the internal restraints which immobilize women and deter them from rebelling against their powerlessness, and so it is of more than academic interest to investigate exactly what these are (1980: 460).

In the case of Aboriginal women, they ‘carry a double burden’. Thus Melissa Lucashenko’s view that “if Aboriginal Australians have been invisible generally, then this has been doubly true for Aboriginal women” (2011: 378). Summers notes, “As women, they were seen as sexual objects and fair game for white men; as members of a subject people they were also victims of the whole range of indignities bestowed by a brutal invading colonialism which considered itself to be the master race” (1980: 276). It is well-known that European men were often brutal to Aboriginal women. They even called the native women ‘black velvet’ which “encapsulates a world of sensual and oral temptations” (Dixon, 1976: 197).

This intensified “the negative feelings about the body – black velvet – and sexuality” among non-Indigenous Australians (*ibid*). Summers notes, “White men in this country have almost always treated black women as whores, as women to have sex with (and maybe leave with half-caste babies) but not as women to marry” (1980: 130). The poverty of Aboriginal women might be one of the reasons why they were treated as prostitutes by the settler men. According to Spivak, being poor, black and female is the cause of marginalization and denial (1994: 294). Therefore, Summers states:

The only way a black woman can find temporary escape from poverty is to follow the vocation which white society has said is all she’s good for and to prostitute herself. But this will be only possible while she is young and still able to attract white men. Within a comparatively short time the ravages of alcohol and disease are likely to restrict her ability to earn in this way. So for black women the chances for avoiding poverty are even more difficult than for white women. The sexist stereotypes which are applied to all women in Australia clamp the lives of black women more firmly in one direction than is the case with white women. The stereotypes work as polar opposites, either a woman is a Madonna figure or she is a whore, and as we have seen, women are seen as being entitled to income only for mothering. If a woman is precluded from this, as black women have been since white colonization of this country, she is automatically cast as a whore and will probably have to become one in order to survive. As a whore she receives money from men but she is not guaranteed an income and is even more dependent upon men than the mother-woman is (130-1)

In this case, Aboriginal women were seen as ‘the enemy’, ‘the cause of the white men’s degradation’. Therefore, the role of white women was ‘to civilize and to breed’ in the sense that they “manage Aboriginal women, and most importantly replace them as the white men’s bedmates” (Philippa Bridges in Riddett, 1993: 79).

Colonial culture stereotypes a view of a ‘woman’ or the idea of womanhood. This white-woman-based-definition contributes to the negative representation of Aboriginal women who are often treated as subhuman beings. Lyn Riddett

states, “By implication the traditional activities of black women, such as food gathering, maintenance of law and custom through active participation in ritual and so on, placed them outside that definition. They were primitive, alien, perhaps not human and, except as sexual partners, not women” (1993: 73). The description of Aboriginal women can be found in the notes of white women who lived in the Northern Territory. Harriet Daly even acknowledges that Aboriginal women fit with Darwin’s theory of the law of selection (in Riddett, 1993: 74). Lady Apsley says that they are “‘primitive child-like’ who could be ‘taught to be extremely useful’. They were also a source of fun!” (in Riddett, 1993: 76). There was a tradition of training all Indigenous women as domestic servants to work in white households. They were trained in needlework such as sewing, knitting and spinning as useful skills for their future employment as domestic servants (Selzer, 1994: 29). For Helen Skardon, Aboriginal women need to be supervised closely to conduct simple domestic tasks, and they were often unreliable (in Riddett, 1993: 78). They are also commonly depicted as ‘shy’, ‘chattering’ and ‘giggling’. Jessie Litchfield states, “A stream of lubras came up to the house, peeping around the corners, giggling delightedly when spoken to, and begging for all sorts of articles” (*ibid*).

Significantly, not only do Indigenous women experience violence from outsiders, they also face internal violence within their communities. As Harriet Daly says, Aboriginal men were dominant in their societies (in Riddett, 1993: 77). Similarly, Lucashenko notes: “To be a Black woman living within an Aboriginal community is to be especially subject to violence at the hands not only of partners and White outsiders ... but also brothers, cousins, fathers, and other Aboriginal men in the vicinity” (2011: 384). Over a period of two centuries violence has been a lifestyle and justifiable in Indigenous society. Being the subject of this

exploitative surrounding makes Aboriginal women consider that the idea to be free from bashing and raping is absurd (384-385).

Furthermore, Indigenous Australian women were assigned domestic jobs both by the settlers and by Aboriginal men. Daly wrote that “lubras search for food, carry the heaviest loads when they shift camp, and are not fed until their husbands are satisfied” (cited in Riddett, 1993: 76). Jessie Litchfield asserts that:

As in all savage communities, the bulk of the work fell upon the lubras at Anson Bay; but there is good reason for this. The man is the food-provider, the camp guarder, and the child protector; he must be free and unhampered with heavy or awkward bundles; he must keep his muscles supple and his spear-arm ready for instant use; he must be able to dart away at a moment’s notice, either in pursuit of game, or to capture an enemy” (*ibid*).

The native women were also pressed to work in settler households:

White women, according to the dominant ideology, could not survive in the north if they did not have domestic help. Aboriginal women cooked, served, cleaned, cared for the children and washed the clothes. ... The lubras, however, “could not wash, in the proper sense of the word, but they rinsed clothes, emptied our washingtubs (*sic*), and brought ... supplies of cold water; they also helped in the process of ‘hanging out’ [the] weekly wash, and in many other ways” (Daly cited in Riddett, 1993: 76).

On the other hand, for Riddett, some of the above descriptions of Aboriginal women were written by non-Indigenous women. These show that settler women “seemed very ill-equipped to understand” the native women’s lives and traditions. Riddett argues, “What was essential, spiritual and meaningful to Aborigines became primitive, barbaric and exotic in the tales told by the settler and traveller women. They watched, curious and often frightened, what they could not understand, and in their ignorance sought clarification, not from Aboriginal women, but mostly from white men, the old-timers” (1993: 82).

Therefore, Aboriginal female writers such as Sally Morgan and Shirley Smith have tried to reconstruct the genuine identities of Aboriginal women through their

writings (Brewster, 1996; Sabbioni, 1996). This is their effort to escape from the identity constructed by male-perspective, both local and colonial. Instead of upholding the depiction of Aboriginal women being the victims of male domination, for example, they reveal that native women are very strong. Morgan writes, “In a lot of Aboriginal families, actually, the women are very strong. In many families I know they carry the weight of the family ... in most of Aboriginal families there is always at least one strong female character with a grandma or an auntie or somebody like that who holds everything together” (cited in Brewster, 1996: 10). Anne Brewster points out that the Indigenous women “have come to occupy a focal position in Aboriginal communal and family life” (*ibid*). Similarly, Smith asserts:

In the black world, years ago, it was a man’s world. ... They [Aboriginal women] was [*sic*] all home. But now, the men have got no responsibility. They’ve shifted everything on to the woman. Now when a man comes home, his wife is out working. Some of them get better money than the men. Black women are running things, saying things. Was a time when they’d be home having babies and saying nothing (cited in Brewster, 10).

Prior to the contact with white Australian society, Aboriginal girls were educated in their clan in a constant if informal way. They were taught how to behave and what to do with the land. They learned through songs, legends, dances and games and by observing their elders. Gender division of labour requires Aboriginal boys to work publicly, such as in hunting groups, and girls to learn ‘womanly skills’ such as childcare, gathering food, making nets and weaving baskets. In their puberty, the girls learned the forms of domesticity from the women in their clan to prepare them for marriage. They were taught physical and emotional nurturing skills: how to support the family economy and to protect the children; how to keep a good and close relation with the young (Selzer, 1994: 28).



Just as Javanese women are considered to have strong hidden power, so are Aboriginal women in the traditional society. Javanese women tended to run the economy of the household. Locher-Scholten emphasises that they “were indeed held responsible for the economic well-being of their families and worked with their husband as ‘two-oxen before the household cart’” (2000: 41). Empirical data from anthropological research suggests that “the traditional [Aboriginal] society was far from a simple patriarchy” (Lucashenko, 2011: 380). Just like in Javanese society, the traditional roles of Indigenous women “were not merely the *chattels* of Aboriginal men; rather, they had status arising from their reproductive role, their circular role as food gatherers responsible for up to 80% of the communal diet, and their own religious life” (F. Gale cited in Lucashenko: 380). Rosalind Miles further notes:

Women of primitive [sic] societies are often far less subjugated than a modern, particularly a Western, observer might expect. Far from being broken-down slaves to their men’s drives and needs, women in early societies often had a better chance of freedom, dignity and significance. Where sheer subsistence is a struggle and survival is the order of the day, women’s equality is very marked. Women in these cultures play too vital role to be kept down or out of action, and their knowledge and experience are a cherished tribal resource (cited in Lucashenko: 380-381).

Similarly, Isobel White also claims that even though Indigenous women have less power than men, they still can influence the decision-making processes. In other words, they are neither submissive nor dominant. In addition, Aboriginal women are also involved in the religious rituals. Although it is not as important as that of men, they play an essential role in many of the spiritual activities (in Lucashenko, 381). As we can see, although violence has been an everyday occurrence, close-knit Aboriginal societies have included Indigenous women sufficient to survive for more than 45,000 years (*ibid*).

These values and traditions constantly inflect the identities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in Australia. The dialogue and interaction between the tradition in the past and present of each individual play an important part in determining their position in the current system and in the future. Some of these identity constructions also occur in *Coonardoo*. For example, the novel reveals how the main character deals with the settler values while still embracing her old values as an Indigenous woman. During this process, resistance coming from herself and her society can occur. In short, the images of Javanese and Aboriginal women in this chapter will be employed to investigate how society in each country plays a significant role in shaping and framing their identity and how they react towards the identity-construction that society imposes on them in the selected texts.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### WOMEN'S IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE IN *THE GIRL FROM THE COAST*

This chapter analyses the construction of women's identity in *The Girl* to reveal how a commoner deals with the dominant patriarchal and colonial ideologies. The central issue in *The Girl* is class conflict. The Girl occupies a subordinated condition, by virtue of her gender and class. Yet in her submissiveness, she challenges the demands of hegemonic power. Her identity construction and resistance will be investigated and linked to the socio-historical contexts in Indonesia.

I realise that whilst readers from Indonesia are quite familiar with *The Girl*, readers from Australia might have not read it. Therefore, before analysing the text I would like briefly to summarise.

##### **Plot Summary of *The Girl***

This novel, which was intended as the first part of a trilogy, tells the story of a young village girl who was married to a Javanese nobleman, the Bendoro (lord) of a local capital, Rembang. In traditional Javanese style, however, she marries not the Bendoro but a dagger, as the ritual proxy of a man of his social standing, and becomes his 'practice wife'. The story is inspired by the author's own grandmother's experience, Satima, who was a 'practice wife' to his grandfather, Haji Ibrahim. After delivering a daughter, Satima was divorced and expelled from Haji Ibrahim's house. The daughter, Pramoedya's mother (Saidah), was then raised by Haji Ibrahim and his new wife, Hazizah, who came from the same noble Javanese class (Pramoedya, 1997: 99-100; Kurniawan, 2002: 16). In the novel, too, the Girl only a 'practice wife' who will be divorced and discarded when one of the

following circumstances occurs: the Bendoro marries a woman of his social standing, the Girl has delivered a baby by the Bendoro, or the Bendoro takes another 'practice wife'. The Girl also faces a difficult situation, living as both a 'first lady' and as a commoner. The gap between the upper classes and the lower classes is intensified with the inferior position of Javanese women in the colonial society of that time.

In the Bendoro's mansion, the Girl is inducted into her role as a practice wife and taught new values as a noble lady by her personal maid known simply as 'mBok', a form of address for lower-class, mature Javanese women. The latter also reminds her that her current position is only temporary. Significantly, mBok finds that it is not easy to change the Girl's way of thinking, for she often questions and disputes values that she considers unreasonable. Indeed, the more mBok tells her about the life of the nobility, the more unsettled and unhappy the Girl is. She imitates the manners of the aristocrats while also undermining their values. As time goes by, the Girl performs her new role as a noble lady to great effect but mBok also acts as an agent of change who will give the Girl a different worldview, one that runs counter to that of the ruling class. On the one hand, she encourages the Girl to accept that fate has set a different position between the noblemen and the commoners, but mBok also inspires the Girl to fight oppressive social ideologies. In one particular incident, the Girl witnesses mBok bravely undermining the nobleman's power when one of the Bendoro's kin stole money from the Girl's room. The consequence is that mBok has to leave the mansion. However, she has 'prepared' the Girl to act as an agent of change. So while the Girl learns to imitate the ways of the Javanese court, she also is given sufficient strength to maintain her own identity.

The Girl eventually learns that the Bendoro's aristocratic family want to get rid of her since they want the Bendoro to have a legitimate marriage with an aristocrat. They plan to murder the Girl when she visits her village but this fails, as the villagers successfully spoil it. During this visit, the Girl feels alienated, from the villagers and even her parents, as they all treat her as an aristocrat and no longer one of them.

On her return to the town, she delivers a daughter, yet again undermining her position as a practice wife, for in Javanese society, a son is more desired than a daughter. Hence, three months after the birth, an unhappy Bendoro heartlessly divorces the Girl and separates her from her daughter. In defending her baby, the Girl is physically attacked by the Bendoro. Even though she is heartbroken, the Girl accepts her fate and gives up her daughter. This means that she accepts, too, that the daughter belongs to her father's world and will grow up to be her master. Finally, she decides to abandon the town but does not go back to her village. The novel concludes with the Girl living in another town where she can start a new life.

### **Women's representation in *The Girl***

In *The Girl*, even though it is said that the position of men and women is relatively equal in the coastal village compared to that in the town, often women remain submissive towards men or recognise the supremacy of the father in the family. This is evident at the beginning of the novel when the fourteen-year-old girl is obliged to follow her parents' decision to marry her to a Bendoro whom she had never met. This marriage will later change her from a village girl whose soul is always filled with the sea into a first lady of a Javanese nobleman in the town. The transition is described thus: She was taken to town. Her body was wrapped in a length of cloth. She wore a *kebaya*, the like of which she had never

imagined herself owning. A thin gold necklace was placed around her neck.

Last night she had been married. Married to a dagger. At that moment she knew: she was no longer her father's child. She was no longer her mother's child. She was married to a *keris*, the symbol of a man she had never seen before in her life (*TG*, 1).

The passive voice used here by the writer intensifies the Girl's hopelessness and lack of agency. She has no control either over her mind or of her body. Somebody else will undertake the preparations for the marriage and crying is her only means to express her distress at being married to somebody who she does not know and being forced to abandon the village. Yet, her mother keeps asking her not to cry. As she cannot help herself, her father finally forces her to stop crying with his threatening voice that makes the Girl feel frightened (*TG*, 2). As a child in a patriarchal society, she must obey whatever her parents, particularly her father, decide. The Girl has no control over her body and mind, as her actions are in response to the demands of other people. Thus we read:

She did not know what lay ahead of her. She only knew that she had lost her whole world. Sometimes her fear drove her to ask why she couldn't stay where she would rather be: among the people she loved, with the bitter smell of the sea, the land and the waves" (*TG*, 2).

The Girl's mother too tells her that it is the duty of a wife to dedicate her life to her husband: "A woman has to be with her husband. I've had to follow your father about, ... even if she lives in a shabby old hut, even if she isn't happy, a woman's one duty is to learn to make her husband happy" (*TG*, 41). The Girl's mother also believes that the behaviour and nature of the husband will determine his wife's behaviour and nature and she thinks that her daughter is fortunate to be married to a pious man who can recite the Quran by heart and who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In her words, "When a woman marries, child, she becomes bad if her man is bad, and good if he is good" (*TG*, 3). This view posits women

as fully dependent upon men – a woman has no value without a man. Hellwig argues: “Their connectedness to the people around them is precisely what makes them dependent and limits their freedom of movement: they feel responsible for the well-being of others, they take care and nurture, and in doing so, they sacrifice their own needs” (1994: 201-202). This situation shows how women are controlled in the area of ‘cultural traditions’ where they are required to perform more traditional values than men are (Katrak, 2006: 11-14).

In the novel, the male-dominated society also occurs in the form of masculine values. The emphasis on masculinity is found at both ends of the social system. Male courage and physical strength are celebrated in the coastal village where life depends very much on the cruel sea. However, masculinity is also asserted amongst the nobility through the power to practice polygamy which is motivated by the desire to have sons to succeed the father. Pramoedya sets the story only a couple of years after the death of R.A. Kartini, a pioneer of women’s emancipation in Java. Kartini struggled for “the education of women, the promotion of monogamy, and a re- evaluation of Javanese culture even if this fight tragically ends in her polygamous marriage and her premature death in childbirth” (Locher-Scholten, 2000: 21-22). Pramoedya’s work shows some of the complexities of gender power under colonialism, in particular how one class uses its privilege to keep women as subordinate through a kind of polygamy. His focus on class might perhaps obscure the fact that feminist postcolonial critique (Loomba, 2002) has argued that reforms (whether native or colonial), leave the wife imprisoned even more under monogamy, and Pramoedya’s allowing his Girl to reject any kind of marriage at the end is perhaps a radical acceptance of this double-bind of gender. Katrak notes that sexual inequalities exists when “colonialism shook hands with individual patriarchies in

exiling women from their bodies” (2006: 55). Through his writing, Pramoedya attempts “to create the necessary conditions for the dismantling of this double marginalisations and the fabrication of a new space wherein women’s specificity can be narrated: in between colonialism and patriarchy” (Bahari, 2007:125).

The hegemonic masculinity also occurs in the possession of beautiful women. For Saraswati, the narrative of female beauty plays an essential part for the colonised men in regaining their masculinity (113). In *The Girl*, it is represented by the Bendoro. The story is opened by the description of the Girl’s beauty that has caught the Bendoro’s attention. The narrator describes: “she was the most beautiful girl in the fishing village on the coast of the Jepara Rembang regency” (*TG*, 1). Once she arrives in the Bendoro’s mansion, Mbok showers her, changes her clothes, gives her perfume, and decorates her eyes with Arabian mascara to ‘shift’ the Girl’s beauty based on the noble’s standard (*TG*, 14). Finding the Girl’s hand very rough, the Bendoro orders her not to work because as a first lady, “[her] hands must be as soft as velvet [and] must always be refined” (*TG*, 16).

Reading *The Girl* against the author’s own life, Pramoedya confessed that he admired “European” beauty (Rudolf Mrazek in Saraswati, 2011: 121). When he was a child, he often looked at pictures in Dutch magazines. He wrote: “The American and European movie stars always had such big eyes, not like these half slant-eyes of my people. ... Since childhood, the big eyes have had an aesthetic effect on me” (Rudolf Mrazek in Saraswati, 121-122). Pramoedya’s European beauty admiration is reflected in the novel when the Girl’s eyes are decorated with Arabian mascara to make her slant-eyes “larger [and thus] gives more authority [to the Girl]” (*TG*, 14). I do not combine the author’s desire with that of the Bendoro’s, but I wish to show the similarity where the practice wives of the Bendoro should have ‘large eyes’. What



sets the two stories different is that the author desires European white beauty whilst the Bendoro is depicted to desire a native 'white' beauty through the Girl's 'decorated big eyes' and some hybrid colonial values imposed to her as 'a first lady'.

Besides being beautiful, the Girl is depicted to be "clever" (*TG*, 68) in embracing the values practised by the nobility as well as questioning and undermining these at the same time. Her teachers admire her ability to learn how to be the first lady, whilst Mbok and the Bendoro sometimes feel annoyed by her irritating questions about the noble's life (*TG*, 55, 68). The depiction of "a super and good-looking" main male character as well as "a pretty and intelligent" main female character in Pramoedya's narratives are aimed "to access as wide an audience as possible" (in Saraswati, 2011: 112-113).

During the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period, "possessing a beautiful woman was considered a means of claiming one's masculinity" (2011: 117). The idea of "[the king], being the most eminent, should possess a beautiful wife" can be traced back in the 14th century Javanese *Tale of Sutasoma* (Helen Creese in Saraswati, 117). Saraswati further explains:

What happened during the colonial period, however, was that racial, gender, and color ideologies of colonialism restructured the everyday lives of colonized peoples, with colonized manhood therefore inevitably being remade in racialized and gendered terms. Colonized men became racially and "politically impotent" after Java was defeated by the Dutch in the Diponegoro War in 1830 (Hadiningrat 1978, 6). Gradually, male native rulers' authority was replaced by those of male Dutch officials and administrators (ibid) (2011: 117).

In *The Girl's* context, even though the collusion of the native fathers and Dutch colonialists in trading native daughters to Dutch colonialists is not directly depicted, the Bendoro's act to possess beautiful ladies from the village, more particularly the

Girl, can be seen as his effort to regain his masculine power while the Dutch is still in power. Lynn Chancer argues that one of the signs of masculine power is “sexual access to beautiful women’s bodies” (in Saraswati, 2011: 119). In addition, the Bendoro’s need to claim his masculinity is not simply about claiming masculinity for himself or for women, but it is also about asserting his masculinity in the eyes of other men, especially those in the village. Hellwig points out, “[m]ale sexual potency is not just manifested toward women; it also plays a crucial part in interactions between men, in their competitiveness and struggles” (1994: 81). As we read in the novel, the concept of masculinity in the village is different from that in the town in which manhood is attributed to men who are physically strong and dare to give up his life for his family.

Common patriarchal links between the town and the village are reflected in how the heroic coastal male figures are sometimes compared to the Javanese noblemen in the town who are depicted as physically weak. Surprisingly for the Girl though, behind their physical powerlessness, the Javanese noblemen’s power is superior to men in the coastal village. She reflects:

She was confused. Why had her father run away? Her two brothers had been swallowed by the sea; they had never run away. Neither had her father. Why had he run away now? He had never been afraid of the sea. Why was he afraid of the Bendoro? Why? Was the Bendoro stronger than the sea? The Bendoro was tall and thin, with a pale face, soft skin, and no muscles to speak of. Why is everybody afraid of him? Why am I afraid of him, too? (*TG*, 27-28).

The power of social class plays a significant role in making gender discrimination is even more evident in the Javanese nobleman’s mansion where a rigid construction of men and women’s space prevails, reflecting that in the society, as well as the difference between a common woman and a noble lady.

“In town, men own the women too, Mas Nganten.” “Well, what do the

women own?”

“Nothing, Mas Nganten. Except ... the commitment to care for their husband’s property.”

“Do they have any property?”

“No, Mas Nganten. They are their husband’s property.”

... she [the Girl] still could not understand why he treated her as though she was of no more worth to him than a table, a chair, a cupboard, or the mattress ...” (*TG*, 56).

The marriage to a dagger is another instance of how male domination and social class inflect Javanese society. It is obvious that the centre of power is so secure it can remain even when absent. In other words, it can be held by proxy, either by human agents or even by objects. *The Girl*, the villagers accept the ‘normality’ of marrying a girl to a *keris*. The *keris* is a sign of what Gramsci calls hegemony. Hegemony is achieved if the lower-class people give their consent to the upper class and adopt their values and beliefs. As Charles E. Bressler asserts, “because the upper class controls the economic base and thereby establishes all the elements that make up the superstructure, such as, music, literature, art, and so forth, they gain spontaneous approval of the lower class. The dominant class enjoys the prestige of the masses and controls the ideology that shapes individual consciousness” (1994: 216). In Javanese social traditions, the ‘execution’ of these processes would be seen in the way that the bridegroom from a higher social class can send a proxy such as his *keris* to represent him in the marriage ceremony (Raffles, 1965; Palmier, 1969; Hutama, 2010). W.H. Rassers explains: “In Java ... If for some reason the man is prevented from appearing before the *pangulu* [a religious leader] on the day fixed for the marriage, it is sufficient when he sends his *kris*” (1940: 525). This is particularly so when the woman is of lower social rank:

“The Bendoro seems to be in a hurry,” whispered the servant. “Perhaps some noble is getting married.”

“To a *keris*?”

“The *keris* is only for marrying common folk, “the servant said, ...”  
(*TG*, 33)

However, Thomas Stamford Raffles asserts that sending a *keris* as a proxy for the bridegroom seldom happens when a man marries for the first time (1965: 318). In the text, the Girl was married with a dagger because she was not the first wife of the Bendoro. When she arrives at her husband’s mansion, she finds some children from the Bendoro’s previous marriages who have never seen their mothers, since their mothers were divorced right after they were born (*TG*, 5-7). In a sense Pramoedya stresses his critique of such practices by suggesting that they are an intrinsic part of established practices rather than one-off events.

From the viewpoint of the Javanese nobility, these marriages are not recognised as real marriages and have only de facto status. Hence mBok’s comment: “...the great nobles ... marry for their own pleasure” (*TG*, 33-34), for no matter how many times the Bendoro gets married with commoners he will still be regarded as a bachelor (*TG*, 102). Moreover, any children born out of such relationships will be his and will take on his rank but only at enormous emotional cost to mother and child. Hellwig notes that “the dominance of paternal power means that [the daughter of the Girl belongs] to a higher class than [her mother]” (1994: 92). As we read in *The Girl*:

“Whose child is that?” the mother whispered again, uncertainly.

“My employer’s. The Bendoro’s.”

.....

“Where is his mother?” insisted the man.

“Gone back to her village.”

When will she be back?” he insisted again.

“She won’t. The Bendoro has divorced her.” (*TG*, 6)

Nevertheless, ‘practice wives’ have the privilege of playing ‘first lady’ in the Bendoro’s mansion, their responsibilities to serve the Bendoro, to manage the

household and to give orders to the housemaids (*TG*, 35). Their responsibilities are to serve the Bendoro, to manage the household and to give orders to the housemaids (*TG*, 35). Thus even though they come from the same social status as the servants, the Bendoro's 'wives' must rule the servants (*TG*, 51). However, the space of the first lady is limited mostly to the bedroom and the kitchen, both traditional women spaces and often of oppression too. She is not supposed to set foot in the middle, in front of the house and in bedrooms other than her own (*TG*, 47). In traditional Javanese architecture, houses have a gendered spatial pattern. The kitchen is mainly a female zone and the southeast corner of *dalem* (the middle of the house) is a male zone (Gunawan Tjahjono in Prasetyningsih, 2008: 6). When the Bendoro has guests, practice wives are not allowed to show themselves (*TG*, 57). Furthermore, the space of worldly power, of decision-making and politics, is not available to them. They are not allowed to know what the Bendoro is doing outside the house (*TG* 55, 68), as reflected in the following passage:

“Where does the Bendoro go, day after day?”

“Men have their own work, Mas Nganten. It's nothing to do with us women. Leave him to it. We have our own affairs to attend to. The house is our territory; that's what we should be looking after.”

“I don't even know all our territory, mBok.” I've never been in the front or the middle of the house.” (*TG*, 49)

The practice wife's duty to take care of the household is unstable, as only the Bendoro's noble wife is entitled to run the household. Leslie H. Palmier reveals that “if he [the nobleman] had yet to marry a head wife [noble lady], the effective running of his household might well be in the hands of a secondary wife [concubine]; but this ended the moment he acquired a head wife” (1969: 54).

Discussing the custom of nobles having a number of wives, Palmier writes: “when polygyny among nobility was almost unheard of, if a nobleman married a

woman of low birth (though she was not, in residence or occupation, a villager) as his only wife, she was alluded to by the nobly born as a ‘secondary wife’. There was a strong feeling that only nobly born women were head wives to noblemen; all other wives were secondary” (1969: 53). Within this system, the parents of the Girl are willing to give her away because it is an honour for ordinary people to have a nobleman as their son-in-law. They believe that it will raise their economic and social status in the village. When the Girl is married, it is not explicitly revealed whether the parents are given any money in exchange for her or not. However, when the Bendoro divorces the Girl, he gives her father some money in ‘compensation’, money that would be “enough to buy two boats and fully equip them” (*TG*, 175). The Bendoro also gives “a bag filled with coins” to the Girl (*ibid*). Furthermore, the Girl’s parents feel fortunate that their daughter is raised from commoner to a noble rank “who would never need to sweat or run outside to carry in the dried fish when the rain began to fall” (*TG*, 3). This position also offers safety and protection for her parents in the village.

No one would dare bother your father, regardless of whether he only lives in a fishing village by the sea or not. No noble. Nor any government official either. He’ll never have to run away. He’ll never have to hide with his children on a coral island somewhere. Never. He’ll have the respect of everyone in his village. They’ll listen to what he has to say (*TG* 40).

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the aristocratic families, the common people are no more than servants undeserving of any respect. It is through the discourses of class consciousness and gender discrimination that the novel traces the shift in the representation of the Girl. At the start of the narrative she is portrayed as “the most beautiful girl in the fishing village on the coast of the Jepara Rembang regency [whose] soul was filled with the breaking of the waves and her eyes with the canoes setting out at dawn and returning at mid-day or during the afternoon”

(*TG*, 1). She enjoys her life in the coast, no matter how hard it is. She is also depicted as a smart girl who is often curious and asks her parents about things that happen in the sea (*TG*, 53). Yet, as she only spends her time living at the coast, she is also portrayed as a naïve girl who measures everything based on the values in the fishing village. Nevertheless, she is set up as exceptional right from the start – someone predestined to rise above the village but also to remain tied to its sea environment. She is a noble soul without noble rank but she is also a peasant girl with a peasant heart. Ambivalence is her framing characteristic.

She is referred to throughout the story only as ‘Gadis Pantai’ or ‘the Girl’. In Indonesian, the term ‘gadis’ means ‘girl, virgin’ and ‘pantai’ denotes her origin in the coast. Her parents and most of the villagers also do not have names. Rather they are referred by their social functions, as *Bapak* (father), *Emak* (mother), *Kepala Kampung* (village headman), and so on. Having no name implicitly symbolises that as common people (*wong cilik*), their individual names and position are not important. They are nobody. Interestingly, the Javanese elite (*priyayi*) also do not use personal names: they are referred to by their titles, not their age or function in the family, such as *Bendoro* (a lord), *Mas Nganten* (the Javanese title for lowest members of the elite), *Bendoro Putri* (a mistress), and so on. Using these titles indicates that position or social class in Javanese society is what counts most. When the Girl moves from her low social milieu and becomes the Bendoro’s wife, she is referred to “Mas Nganten” (*TG*, 12). This is the status she temporarily has as the Bendoro’s wife: it is not her personal identity, and she may at any time lose it. Therefore, her position is complicated: she belongs neither to commoner nor to noble ranks, as she does not actually enjoy the privilege of being the first lady. She feels alienated both in the new place and in her old village. Her parents and people

can no longer treat her and refer to her as the Girl whom they knew. When she visits her village, the villagers bow to her and call her 'Bendoro Putri', indicating that there is a different position between them (*TG*, 107-110). Even her father feels reluctant to look at the Girl (*TG*, 109). These names and titles are all social – not individual. They are all part of a wider social system which is structured in terms of social hierarchy. The absence of personal, private, intimate names reveals these dynamics as a system – a reality that structures the fate of subjects. So these titles represent practices of subjectification and identification, which constantly shifts as Hall noted.

However, at the end of the narrative, after delivering a baby girl, the Girl is divorced and ejected from the mansion. Even though she has obeyed her parents, served the Bendoro and done her job as a first lady, the Girl is condemned for her class, and punished for delivering a baby girl (*TG*, 172). As we saw, Katrak asserts that women are regarded as “reproductive units bought and sold through traditions” and even “her body may be prostituted within marriage” (2006: 162). However, “As a mother, her outsidersness to patriarchal power is slightly ameliorated, especially if she bears sons who will preserve male authority” (209). Unfortunately, the Girl cannot fulfil this patriarchal expectation. Consequently, having been abandoned by the town and uprooted from her origin, she decides to go to another place where she might have a life and her own identity, neither the village anonymity as the Girl nor the court anonymity as Mas Nganten (*TG*, 184). Here she chooses her own fate, rejecting the structured positions society provides for her. This suggests that in the colonial and class-structured social system, individuals have a choice – but it is a choice to be an outsider. It is indeed a costly choice.



The shift in identity that the Girl undergoes – a commoner then a noble woman then a commoner again – fits with Hall’s idea that identity is not an “already accomplished fact ...[rather, that identity] is always in process” (1990: 226). Identity is “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” and “belongs to the future as much as to the past” (225). In the text, the Girl’s identity as a commoner continues to speak to her even though she has already become the Bendoro’s wife. She tries to practise aristocratic values in her new identity, yet at the same time she cannot avoid favouring her old identity. She often compares the gap between the two ways of life through her memory and myth, as seen in the following quotation:

“Husbands and wives treat each other differently there [in a fishing village].”

“I know. They eat together, sit together, drink coffee together. When the man is home from the sea, they talk about all sorts of things.”

.....

“Do husbands and wives ever talk to each other in town?”

“Oh, Mas Nganten, in this town, perhaps in every town I suppose – men own the whole world. It isn’t like that in fishing villages, but it is everywhere else. In town, men own the women too, Mas Nganten.” (*TG*, 55)

However, the intimate moment between the Bendoro and the Girl almost removes the differences between them. Real affection or love is shown as a way of breaking conventions, but it is momentary, secret and ultimately powerless.

Hall also asserts that “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within” (1990: 225). In the narrative, the Girl, as a commoner, cheerfully shares the common cultural codes with other people in the village. But being ‘dirty’, ‘poor’, ‘heathen’, ‘ignorant’, backward, uneducated, uncivilised and powerless are constructions by the upper class people of the commoners’ identity (*TG*, 22, 104, 122). However, the villagers position themselves as being egalitarian and sustaining human values (*TG*, 55).

Quite a similar process occurs amongst the nobility. The ‘collective social identities’ in high society are the opposite of the commoners: rich, educated, religious, modern, civilised, clean and powerful (*TG*, 2, 3). However, as a new member of the noble family, the Girl learns that being a lady is like being imprisoned in a host of rules and limitations compared to the freedom that she has in the village (*TG*, 24). She also finds that the place where values of the nobility dominate, which seems like heaven from outside, is actually a ‘hell’ inside, since humanity is less valued here (*TG*, 183). Everything is measured in terms of social status and material possessions:

Gradually the Girl came to understand that she was a queen. She gave orders to everyone else. Only one person gave her orders: the Bendoro, her husband and her lord. Her youthful mind could not accept a situation in which human beings only gave orders to, or received orders from, other human beings. Something important was missing: the pleasure one derived from working with other people. No one worked with anyone else here. Some served. And some gave orders (*TG*, 52).

The internal conflict the Girl experiences during the transformation of her identity from the Girl from the coast into Mas Nganten shows her resistance toward the new values that she considers inhuman. This will become more obvious when I discuss the Girl’s resistance toward the nobility’s worldview.

Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, one can argue that the cultural identities of commoners and noblemen in *The Girl* “reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide [the commoners and noblemen] with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (Hall, 1990: 223). Hall sets this quality as the first definition of cultural identity. Appiah also defines this situation as ‘collective social identities’ that “provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories” (1994: 160) or “notions of how a proper person of that

kind behaves/modes of behaviour” (159).

If we follow these ideas, we can see that the Girl has two ‘scripts’ to live by: the ‘natural’ socialisation of the fishing village and the ‘learned’ role of court lady. Her identities are “not only constructed through concepts made available by religion, school, and state, and mediated to varying degrees by the family” but are built up also in “dialogue with other people’s understandings” (Appiah, 1994: 154). In the narrative, the Girl’s identity is constructed through concepts practised in the village and town. She obtains the values of a commoner from her parents and villagers. Through the dialogue with her father, she learns that humans are created equal in the village so that nobody is richer or has more property than the others:

“Money is of no use to me [the Girl’s father]. I can’t buy anything here. Our house is the same as everyone else’s. And so are we.”

“Tell him [Bendoro] the sea provides us with all we need. The sea is rich. It is just our human effort counts so little. ...” (*TG*, 119).

The Girl also learns that the equality in the village allows her to say anything she likes and to whomever she wants. The narrator says, “She could insult the Bendoro if she wanted to, or anyone else at all for that matter” (*TG*, 51). However, this is not entirely true, since as noted earlier the Girl must obey her parents and marry the Bendoro. This is a kind of mythology of equality which assists people maintaining communal relations because they are dependent on each other. The Bendoro does not share this mythology, since he and his class have resources that make them independent. In the village, help is very important, whilst in the town everything is about order and service (*TG*, 51). These collective cultural identities of the subaltern and superior classes are constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myths (Hall, 1990: 226).

A similar process also occurs when the Girl’s is abruptly transformed into a

noble lady. She is very young when she encounters a new and very different world outside her egalitarian milieu – too young to understand the hierarchy and the world of aristocratic people. By observing her surroundings and through dialogue with the people around her – her parents, mBok, the Bendoro, the Bendoro's nephews – she gradually understands that she is no longer a commoner. It is mBok, the Bendoro's old servant, who acts as the most effective agent of change in the Girl's shifting identity. Her responsibility is to shape the Girl's consciousness as a new member of the upper class. Her responsibility is to shape the Girl's consciousness as the new member of the upper class. "In this way, the servant gradually began to tame the Girl's wildness and to civilize her so that she might be fit to be the first lady" (*TG*, 36). By this, she will make the Bendoro "pleased with her effort" (*TG*, 36). Such taming is reflected in restrictions of expression, space and body movement:

Before, she had been able to say whatever she thought, to cry when she was sad, and to laugh when she was happy. She was a child. Now she had to keep quiet – for there was no one to listen to her. Now she could only whisper.  
.....

Yesterday she had been able to look wherever she wanted to look. Now she could only stare at the floor, because she didn't know at what or at whom she was allowed to look (*TG*, 19).

Bearing the title of *Mas Nganten* requires the Girl to leave all of her values from the coast behind. The Bendoro says: "Don't behave like a villager. You're married to a noble" (*TG*, 91). In this mansion, she is not expected or allowed to work like she used to do when she was in the village. Her "hands must be as soft as velvet [since] the first lady must always be refined" (*TG*, 16). She needs only to "lift her finger and everything she wants she gets" (*TG*, 13). She also must do everything that makes her husband happy (*TG*, 18) by learning to be "clever" and wise (*TG*, 20), to be always "smiling" (*TG*, 25), to be "more patient than the Bendoro" (*TG*,

25), to hide tears (*TG*, 41), and “to please others” (*TG*, 41).<sup>16</sup> It is obvious that these values are external, they relate to the outward demeanour and behaviour. There is not much to do with convictions, beliefs and values. It is as if simply performing in a particular way will do. In her home village, the Girl used to be her parents’ servant, but in this mansion she becomes the mistress (*TG*, 25, 35).

When the Girl has a chance to visit her parents in the village, her parents’ and her people’s attitudes also change. She is regarded as a princess, not the Girl from the coast any more (*TG*, 107-111). The villagers and even her own parents no longer consider her to be part of the fishing village (commoners). They admire the Girl’s appearance, attitude and behaviour that reflect her new identity as a member of the upper classes. The way the villagers saw the Girl shows their inferiority and their ‘otherness’. The inferior attitude can be seen in the Girl’s father’s reluctance to call her name the way he used to call her before she becomes Mas Nganten (*TG*, 117). Since the villagers’ social status is now lower than the Girl’s, they refer to her as Bendoro Putri or Mas Nganten (*TG*, 112, 113). Being educated as a lady ironically separates the Girl from her own community, for she feels alienated in her own village. She attempts to break social conventions by asking the villagers to stop addressing her as Bendoro Putri and asking her father to address her by own name (*TG*, 112, 117). Yet, the hierarchies in Javanese society are too powerful that the Girl fails to break the practices of class distinction.

Civilising the Girl is also conducted by introducing her to lady-like ideas and work, varying from domestic Indonesian skills to Dutch colonial skills. The

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<sup>16</sup> The values of refined (*alus*) and unrefined (*kasar*) are principal in *priyayi* (gentry) worldview, as these distinguish *priyayi* identity from non-*priyayi*. *Priyayis* are people who do ‘refined’ work whilst commoners (peasantry) do ‘unrefined’ work. The former’s behaviour is also constructed as ‘refined’ and the latter as unrefined (Geertz, 1960: 229, 239).

Bendoro sends some instructors to teach the Girl and she learns “making batik”, “making cakes”, “pious legends from the distant Middle Ages”, Dutch “embroidery”, “lace- making”, “needle-craft”, and “reading” (*TG*, 43-44). All of her teachers are very pleased with her “skill and neatness” (*TG*, 43-44). Being able to absorb the Dutch language, she can understand things that happen around her which she previously had no idea about (*TG*, 43). These skills contribute to her new identity as ‘a princess’ (*TG*, 43). Thus, “the memory of her father, mother, brothers, and sisters slowly began to fade” (*TG*, 43) and she gradually gets used to “a life in which there were many facilities to make her work easier” (*TG*, 43).<sup>17</sup>

Although the novel is set in the time of the Ethical Policy in which education was one of the aims of the Dutch government, the expansion of Dutch education only reached girls from the local elites, as noted above (Locher-Scholten, 2000: 19). Blackwood also asserts that “efforts at educating aristocratic Indies girls meant introducing them to properly gendered roles as ‘modern’ housewives and mothers, like their Dutch benefactors” (2005: 864). This situation occurs when the Girl enters the world of nobility in which she needs to learn some skills to function well as a noble lady. As she is not a real lady, she does not go to a formal school. The teachers sent to the mansion train the Girl in modern skills (*TG*, 43). However, she also obtains an informal education from the people around her such as the Bendoro, mBok, her mother and so forth who train her behaviour from a common child into an aristocratic lady.

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<sup>17</sup> These skills were taught in some schools in 1920s with two goals: “preparation for a financially independent existence for girls and ‘the cult of domesticity’ [as well as] to prepare indigenous girls for their future as housewives” (Gouda in Locher-Scholten, 2000: 39). Locher-Scholten states that “this kind of education did lead unavoidably to Westernization [since] courses in home economics referred to the ‘professionalization’ of the household, a twentieth-century process in Western countries, in which women had to fulfil certain duties along prescribed lines of training and performance” (2000: 39).

Interestingly, the diction used by members of the nobility to describe the lower classes, such as their 'wildness' and description such as 'dirty', 'ignorant', 'poor', and 'backward', can be linked to the discourse of colonialism. This is reflected especially in their comments on the need 'to civilise' and 'to tame' them. For example, there is a saying 'vuile Inlander' in Dutch which means 'dirty native' in the Indies (Sutherland, 1979: 150). The way the Bendoro and other members of the upper class treat the commoners is equivalent to how the colonisers behaved toward the colonised people. As Ashcroft *et al.* assert:

It [colonial discourse] creates a deep conflict in the consciousness of the colonized because of its clash with other knowledges (and kinds of knowledge) about the world. Rules of inclusion and exclusion operate on the assumption of the superiority of the colonizer's culture, history, language, art, political structures, social conventions, and the assertion of the need for the colonized to be 'raised up' through colonial contact. ... through such distinctions it comes to represent the colonized, whatever the nature of their social structures and cultural histories, as 'primitive' and the colonizers as 'civilized'" (1998: 42-43).

When the Dutch shifted from commercial trading to creating a colonial state, they created in direct rule from the local lords who survived. Vickers notes:

Under this system, the Dutch saw themselves as preserving tradition by providing a layer of wise administration above the natural native leaders of the people. Traditional rulers became regents, the indigenous aristocracy became an indigenous civil service. They were placed under the hierarchy of Dutch officials: the Residents, Assistant Residents, and the District Officers. This indirect rule would not disturb the traditional life of the peasantry, and besides, it was cheap, since the Dutch did not have to recreate a state form the bottom up. In 1900 Queen Wilhelmina needed only 250 European and 1,500 indigenous civil servants, and of course her army, to rule 35 million colonial subjects (2005, 14-15).

In the case of road building, Dutch officials showed a complete self-interested focus on getting the job done no matter what (TG, 34, 113). The colonial power is cruel, and uses people: so too the Bendoro, who owes his position partly to

colonial indulgence and transfers such power into his traditional aristocratic male privilege, exploiting the Girl and others before her for ‘practice’.

Even though the occupation of the Bendoro is not clearly described in the text, his position in the Dutch government can be traced through his relation with the other local lords as members of the indigenous civil service. His closeness to the Dutch officials can be seen when the Girl’s mother says: “*Bendoro Bupati* often calls him to his side. *Tuan Besar Residen* has been to his house” (TG, 3). *Bendoro Bupati* is a Regent, the highest native administrative official in Dutch-ruled areas of Java and *Tuan Besar Residen* is a Dutch colonial official, between Governor and Assistant Resident (Sutherland, 1979: xix). Furthermore, on one occasion, the Bendoro has an important guest. They talked about ‘disturbance in Lombok’ and ‘war’ (TG, 58). The guest also mentions ‘the Council of the Dutch East Indies’ (TG, 58). In the history of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, Dutch military forces took over Lombok in 1894 (Vickers, 2005: 11). This occurs around the time of the setting of *The Girl*, which is at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20th century. From their dialogue, it is implied that both the Bendoro and his guest are on the side of the Dutch government, particularly when the Bendoro disapproves of the riots in Lombok by saying that they do not have any ‘gratitude towards the government’ (TG, 58). The Bendoro and the other Javanese elites such as the lower level of local government serve double functions in the society. They are “a feared and admired ruling class, but they were also the subordinate agents of an alien regime” (Sutherland, 1979: 1).

Accordingly, when the Girl learns the ways of Java’s native elite, she also acquires some of the hybrid culture of the colonial middle-men. This includes “language, costume, and food” (Protschky, 2008: 347). Sartono Kartodirdjo, A.



Sudewo and Hatmosuprobo. argue that the coming of Western food such as sausage, bread, steak, biscuit, and lemonade influenced the life style of the *priyayi* (1987: 84). This is seen in *The Girl* when the Bendoro appears to adopt Dutch table manners. On his dining table there are “bottles of marmalade jam”, “chocolate sprinkles, and treacle”, “squeezed orange juice, a plate of prawn crackers and a large dish of Dutch porridge”, as well as “silver knives, forks and spoons” and “warm steaming bread” (TG, 23). Since the Girl is not used to Dutch food, she is confused: “She did not know which was chocolate sprinkles, which treacle, and which the marmalade” (TG, 23). However, MBok is always there to ‘whisper’ and ‘guide’ her on how to serve the Bendoro using European table manners. Indeed, *priyayi* women were trained to run a household like a European household including (formal) dinner style. Locher- Scholten asserts that Javanese servants who worked for European families “acquired an intimate knowledge of European housekeeping [and were taught] the European menu” (2000: 41). MBok does not work for a European family, yet her expertise in European housekeeping shows that European ways have created a new colonial version of royal culture in the Bendoro’s household.

As the Girl has entered a hybrid-aristocratic family, she is also expected to practise the hybrid culture. Blackwood asserts:

Dutch women organized their lives around their domestic activities. Efforts at educating aristocratic Indies girls meant introducing them to properly gendered roles as ‘modern’ housewives and mothers, like their Dutch benefactors. After 1900 education for these girls included preparation for their housewifely duties as future mothers (Gouda 1995). The Dutch also established vocational schools for girls of lower-level civil-service families to learn domestic skills (Tiwon 1996). In the early decades of the twentieth century, women of the elite class were urged to acquire a Western education with the intention that they would become better wives to modern men and exemplary mothers of future leaders of the nation (Locher-Scholten 2003; Taylor 1997). Colonial discourse set the conditions for the production of a virulent gender difference in which women were contained within the

categories of wife, mother, or concubine (*nyai*) (2005: 864).

This supports Katrak's concept of women's disempowerment in which colonialism combines with indigenous patriarchy to doubly restrict gender roles, even under the rubric of liberal education. Obtaining an education, either in colonial or local society, requires stepping out from familiar surroundings into a new environment (Katrak, 2006: 124).

### **Women's resistance in *The Girl***

The meeting point between past and new identities creates what Bhabha calls a 'partial presence', a condition described as denoting a subject who is "almost the same but not quite" (1994: 123). In other words, the Girl 'acts out' being a high status woman, but still retains other narratives in her memory. During this shift, the Girl often questions new ideas and knowledge. So, while following all rules required to fit in as a first lady in the Bendoro's mansion, the Girl also undermines the aristocrats' values both silently and verbally. In this role she is partly aided by mBok's ambivalent advice and actions, as when she challenges one of the young men living in the Bendoro's house (*TG*, 74). Katrak explains that "women resist bodily oppressions by using strategies and tactics that are often part of women's knowing and acting" and "their female bodies" such as 'speech' and 'silence' (2006: 2, 8). This is a performance metaphor of life or an identity.

In the mansion, the Girl encounters new ways of life which are influenced by Islamic and Javanese aristocratic values as well as the version of modernity introduced by Dutch colonialism. The status of the Bendoro as a "pious man" becomes one of the reasons why The Girl should be grateful for being his wife (*TG*, 3). As previously revealed, the Girl's mother finds that the Bendoro's pious reputation will determine her daughter's future. She believes that the Bendoro

can use his knowledge in religion to ‘educate’ the Girl to become a ‘good’ wife or mother. Loomba suggests that religion has been used in colonised spaces to enforce women’s subordination (2002: 226). Even though it has a slight difference from the concept of missionaries in European colonialism, the main goal is relatively similar: “to educate girls to be good wives and mothers, discouraging them from participating in the world outside the home” (Katrak, 2006: 73).

In the narrative, most of the new ideas taught to the Girl are based on Islamic teachings. These are reflected at least in some mentions of Islamic symbols such as ‘khalwat’ (‘a prayer room’) (*TG*, 18), the uttering of pious phrases ‘Bismillahirrohmanirrohim’ (‘In the Name of Allah, the Merciful and the Compassionate’) (*TG*, 20), ‘Insya Allah’ (‘God willing’), valuing anyone who is a ‘haji’ (‘has made pilgrimage’) (*TG*, 15), and reading the Koran (*TG*, 15). The very first concept that the Girl receives from the Bendoro is the idea that dirtiness works hand-in-hand with poverty in the village. This occurs as the consequence of refusing to learn and practise Islamic values:

I know all the villages along this part of the coast. They’re all the same. I went to your village ten years ago. It was dirty, poor and no one practised the faith. People who believe in religion disapprove of dirt. An abundance of dirt causes Allah’s wrath. Allah does not prosper people like that. They remain poor (*TG*, 22).

The Bendoro shows the Girl that people in town, in the centre, are different from people in the fishing village, the periphery. In the town, they are clean, prosperous, and religious – not to say educated in terms of religion. As a new member of a high status family, the Girl needs to be educated with the religious values practised by the nobility.

The Girl learns that the values practised by the noble people are sometimes implicitly associated to Islam. For instance, when the Girl feels reluctant to do some

things required as a first lady and insists on doing what she used to do in the village, mBok 'tames' her 'wildness' by referring to religious teaching:

... "Allah only wants one thing, Mas Nganten. He wants people to be good. That's why He gave us religion. So people can lead orderly, pious life. But obviously, Allah's one wish is not wholly fulfilled. Here are a lot of bad people in the world."

"Oh! Am I one of the bad people God doesn't want?"

"Who knows what is in another person's heart? Not even the Devil himself. Most of us don't even know what is in our own hearts. If we did, then perhaps we wouldn't have to live on earth at all. ... (TG, 35)

It is obvious that mBok tries to teach the Girl not to be too persistent with the new values and too proud of her life in the past. The words 'good', 'orderly, pious life' and 'religion' in the quotation are concepts that are used to legitimise the position of the religious educated aristocrats as those whose values are always true and should be imitated. In other words, since they practise religion, whatever their 'lived system of meanings and values' may be, it is always justifiable. They have the power to tell people what should be done to be good as if they were the representatives of God. In the passage, it is also obvious that mBok tells the Girl the different position of the educated aristocrats and the 'ignorant' villagers – 'good' versus 'bad' people. However, when the Girl points to herself as a bad person because she does not practise religion, mBok tries to calm her by implying that nothing or nobody can judge people being good or bad. MBok does two things: bridging the gap between these two classes or expanding the interests of the dominant class, while also undermining its position. The earlier part is done to make the Girl believe that there is still a chance to be a good person if she is eager to negotiate the values of the new milieu. This conversation occurs because the Girl resists any ideas which mBok tells her about her responsibilities as a first lady. The Girl always challenges the ideas which are contrary to what she wants (TG, 35).

Nevertheless, mBok's response to the Girl's question also challenges the idea that religion determines whether people are good or bad. In other words, even though the aristocrats practise religion, it does not guarantee that their actions are good.

Moreover, although an agent for the nobility, mBok often shows her unease towards the values that she teaches the Girl. Coming from a lower-class group in a colonial society, she has encountered oppression both from the native rulers and the Dutch colonials. This experience taught her how to deal with the dominant power. She understands when and how to perform her submission as well as her subversion. It is then arguable that while performing her duty as the agent of the nobility, mBok sometimes makes the power of the rulers and the ruled people interchangeable. She knows "too many things [that even] sometimes the Bendoro himself has to ask [her] when he doesn't know" (*TG*, 40). Nevertheless, in some conversations with the Girl, mBok discloses more than she is required to. The naivety of the Girl prompts mBok to warn her not to forget her true identity as a commoner. She wants to prepare the Girl for when the time comes to give up her new-found identity as a noble lady (*TG*, 63).

"Don't worry about me, Mas Nganten. I'm a commoner, one of the little people, lowly and of no value. When I fall from grace, it hurts, but not that much. But when an upper-class person falls, Mas Nganten, that really hurts. The higher his status, the greater the fall and the suffering. Sometimes, a fall can be deadly. Don't ever forget that. A commoner like myself can fall a thousand times a day and still can get up again. Fate insists he get up again every day, no matter how often he falls." (*TG*, 63)

The word 'fate' in the passage implies that the difference between upper-class and lower-class people is internalised by the commoners as something ordained by God or sanctioned by religion, and being a commoner is regarded as a 'fault' (*TG*, 63). Therefore, the Girl should avoid any more faults in her responsibility as the Bendoro's wife.

“The One who we worship and revere has willed that we should both be dependent on members of the upper class. Without the working class, there can be no upper class.” (*TG*, 63)

Ironically, while spreading the idea that the existence of an ‘upper class’ and a ‘working class’ is a natural law, mBok also uncovers the stories of heroes drawn from nobility and commoners. For instance, the old woman tells the story of Surapati, an ‘extraordinary’ slave who became a king after defeating ‘every other king in Java’ and ‘the Dutch company’ (*TG*, 63). She also tells the struggle of her grandfather, her husband, and herself as commoners dealing with the violence of the Dutch (*TG*, 37-39). Moreover, mBok explains to the Girl Kartini’s fame and bravery: she “wasn’t afraid to stand up to the Dutch” (*TG*, 44) and was respected by both the local rulers and the Dutch. She tells also the story of Prince Diponegoro who rebels the Dutch. Through these stories, mBok intends to show the Girl that anybody can fight back against oppression – be it Dutch colonialism and/or the hypocritical local rulers.

To a degree, mBok’s ambivalent position also influences the way the Girl receives the new values. Her patience and openness in her responses to the Girl’s questions strengthens the Girl’s resistance and triggers the slippage of the rulers’ position. In other words, the stories have contributed to the Girl’s ambivalent subjectivity insofar as she subverts even in the act of imitating the noble’s culture. The stories about “the fate of the common people and the greatness of the nobility”, “the fall of the common people and the honour due to their superiors”, “the way commoners depended on the nobles”, “power and destiny”, and “Allah and Dutch government” have aroused more curiosity and unease in the Girl’s mind (*TG*, 68). On one hand, she starts falling in love with the Bendoro and is afraid of losing her position as a Mas Nganten. On the other hand, her mind cannot stop criticising

the nobility's values. Thus, while trying her best to maintain her position as a first lady by avoiding any flaw in her service to the Bendoro, the Girl also gradually shows her great disappointment more openly:

“You were raised beside the sea but you know nothing of pearls ...”  
He laughed again. “What about your father? ... “

“He’s never even heard of them, Bendoro.”

The Bendoro laughed out loud again. “Pearls are only for the very brave, Mas Nganten. The divers have to go right down to the bottom of the ocean. ...”

“Perhaps my father isn’t a brave man, Bendoro. Perhaps he doesn’t dive for pearls. ... But please don’t despise him. Please. He doesn’t want pearls. Just enough corn to feed her family.”

“That’s not right,” the Bendoro interrupted her. “Corn doesn’t grow in the sea.”

“No, Bendoro. Fate never favours the poor, foolish working class.”

“... I’ll thank you, Mas Nganten, not to use the words ‘working class’ and ‘upper class’. ...” (*TG*, 68)

Apart from her criticism of the ruling-class values in her conversation with mBok, the Girl has been questioning many things and comparing the values in the village and town silently since she first came to the mansion. Her criticisms are mostly about human values. For example, she cannot accept the fact that social rank and wealth determine who people are. The Girl’s challenge to the idea of social class and her support of equality are evident in the narrative, for instance:

The servant bowed to her. A very low bow. Why was she bowing? A few moments ago they had been equals. Why had the woman suddenly changed her behaviour? The Girl from the Coast was nervous, frightened, and suspicious. ... (*TG*, 12)

.....  
The Girl’s heart screamed: Why can’t we [Mbok and herself] be friends? Why do you act like a slave all the time? Who am I? What crime did you commit that has made you so subordinate to me? (*TG*, 26)

In addition, the Girl overtly challenges the masculine values practised in the town. She honours the man in the village who is not only physically strong but would also “give [his] life for his family” (*TG*, 3). Yet these ideals are destabilised when the Girl finds that in the mansion, Bendoro, the most powerful man, is

physically not strong but that, ironically, is very powerful (*TG*, 53). MBok then tells the Girl that the town people learn about the concept of heroes from ‘shadow puppet theatre’ (*wayang kulit*) which the villagers hate.<sup>18</sup> The following is a typical heroic story in Javanese shadow puppet repertoire that legitimises the idea that heroes do not have to be physically strong.

“In every war, Mas Nganten, “the old woman began her tale, “the giants are always defeated by slender young warriors. The monsters are full of fire; they can’t stand still for a moment. But the hero reaches out his little finger and the giants tumble down. They can’t get up again! The hero hardly moves from his place, while the giants are jumping all over the place, forwards and back, ready to explode.” (*TG*, 54)

Ward Keeler has commented that Javanese people often speak of the most important quality one can learn from the stories in *wayang*: “the way they illustrate both the importance of hierarchy in ordering social relations and every person’s responsibility to respect that order by fulfilling his or her own role within it” (1992: 59). In other words, Javanese people are supposed “to speak in a manner appropriate to one’s own station and to the station of the person one addresses” (1992: 60). Keeler says that one’s ability to perform this defines his or her ‘personal maturity’ (1992: 60). In *The Girl*, *wayang* is used as a tool to preserve the hierarchal position of the Javanese aristocrats in the town (centre) and commoners in the coastal village (periphery). The hostility of the villagers towards *wayang* occurs because the stories of *wayang* do not represent their interests. For them, the most powerful thing in the world is the sea, since it gives them food to survive (*TG*, 54). For the villagers, *wayang* is only a tool used by the ruling class people to ‘trick’ them. They believe

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<sup>18</sup> *Wayang kulit* is a shadow play in the Javanese tradition that tells stories about “gods, heroes, and monsters who are able to flout the usual limits on human capacities: many can fly, ..., and some control weapons of great magical potency” (Keller, 1992: 1). It shows “refined heroes with tiny waists and impossibly long arms, the big-nosed, pop-eyed giants, and the heroines with skirts that extend forward rather than trail behind them ..., these conventionalized images rule out any straightforward equivalences between the physical appearance of characters in the plays and the look of humans in life” (*ibid*).



that the people in the town only ‘sell lies’ to them by telling them stories through the *dalang* (puppeteer) about how ‘powerful’ the ‘pieces of leather’-made characters in the *wayang* are. These figures symbolise the great nobles who have absolute power in the world (*TG*, 54). The city folk consider these figures as their ancestors.

If education was meant to liberate, it has the opposite effect for the Girl. The more the Girl learns about the world of the nobility, the more competent yet unsettled she becomes. The knowledge – moral values and skills – that she learns has both imprisoned and prompted questioning and comparison. She says: “There were too many iron bands, invisible hands” which restrain her freedom (*TG*, 24). The atmosphere in the mansion is also “unbearably oppressive” (*TG*, 11). For her, the *priyayi*’s “brick-walled mansions are hell. Hell and insensitive” (*TG*, 183). Since “knowledge was a costly commodity for someone in her circumstances” (*TG*, 55), every time her wise counsellor explains new concepts, the Girl can hardly ‘understand’ them (*TG*, 53). MBok then says, “If everyone could understand, Mas Nganten, there’d be no value in being a noble” (*TG*, 52). In other words, if everyone understands how the ruling elites attempt to perpetuate their power by popularising their own morality and render them an unchallengeable part of the natural order of things, this will lead to an open revolution. MBok’s statement also seems to be a way of silencing the Girl. The Girl is very ‘clever’ so that sometimes the old servant cannot answer her questions and the Bendoro is astonished with her answers (*TG*, 51, 55, 62, 67, 68). The narrator explains:

Perforce she had to think for herself now, make more decisions, act on her own behalf. Increasingly the old woman could no longer give her what she needed. Because the old woman could not answer her questions, the Girl had to come to her own conclusions. It was not enough to be told something; she needed to know why. (*TG*, 71)

However, opposing the dominant power too openly will result in severe punishment. For example, when mBok undermines the ruling class's power, she is sent away from the mansion by the Bendoro (*TG*, 82). She exercises this courage only once in all the time she serves in the household. Yet, this still leads to exclusion and exile, recalling Katrak's comment on the cost of rebellion (2006: 58). Locher-Scholten states that "silenced by the subservient nature of their work and the subordinated class they came from, Indonesian or Javanese servants in the former Netherlands Indies were neither expected nor allowed to speak for themselves" (2000: 85).

MBok's last story to the Girl before she leaves the mansion obviously shows her stance toward the kind of double oppression they experience:

"Let me tell you the story, Mas Nganten, perhaps the last story I'll ever tell you. Do you remember the story I told you about my grandfather, who supported Prince Diponegoro in his war against the Dutch? ... An assistant district head told him. 'Don't serve me, brother. If you serve me and I'm defeated, then, assuming you're still alive, you'll have to find someone else to serve. What if you found another Bendoro and he was defeated too? No, brother, no. Serve the land, not me. The land gives you food and drink. The kings, the lords, and the regents have sold this sacred land to the Dutch. The fight against the kings, lords, and regents has only just begun. It will take more than one generation, brother. Until you defeat them, you'll never be able to face the Dutch. It may take generations. But we must start now.'" (*TG*, 79)

It is implied that the struggle to fight colonialism should be started from the fight against the hypocritical native rulers who act as the agents of the Dutch colonials. This system allows the traditional leaders to work as regents or civil servants for the colonial government; thus, they are also called "the subordinate agents of an alien regime" (Sutherland, 1979: 1). The local chiefs "bridged the gap between the dominant European caste, with its overriding economic and political interests, and the peasantry" (*ibid*). Through mBok, Pramoedya voices his criticism

of “the repressive mechanisms ... as a result in colonialism and Javanese social structure [on all levels]” (Hellwig, 1994: 94).

The relationship between the elites of the two races and cultures is based not only on “the colonial regime and bureaucratic functioning of the civil services [but also] “the cultural and intellectual bases” (Sutherland, 1979: 2). For instance, as they gradually practise values brought by colonialism such as Dutch table manners and speaking the settler’s language, the native rulers play their ambivalent role as colonised selves. In this way, they exchange their self-identity for a newly constructed colonial-identity. In the text, it is obvious that only the well-born townsfolk such as the Bendoro and his relatives who have access to the Dutch formal schooling can speak Dutch (*TG*, 7). Heather Sutherland states that “many educated *priyayi* [are] proud of their mastery in Dutch and European social forms” (1979: 37). Hence we read in *The Girl*:

... they [villagers] heard the Bendoro Guru speaking in the language they couldn’t understand and Agus Rahmat answering him in the same unfamiliar language.

“The Bendoro teaches his sons very well,” the headman whispered.

”Even the little ones can speak Dutch. And we don’t understand a single word. Your child, “he said turning toward the Girl from the Coast, “will learn to talk like that.” (*TG*, 7-8)

The fact that the Bendoro and his relatives can mimic the way the Dutch speak is seen as something extraordinary by the commoners; accordingly, they believe it to be the key to a brighter future. As subaltern people who have no access to education, they do not understand Dutch. Therefore, when the Girl becomes a ‘practice wife’ of a Javanese nobleman, the fishing villagers believe that someday her child or even herself will be able to be ‘like’ a Javanese aristocrat who can speak Dutch. They want to move from their peripheral or marginal position into the centre position, from backward into modern, and so remain caught up in the

power structure of colonial Java.

However, the encounter of the Girl with the aristocratic-colonial-values is a traumatic experience. The Bendoro and his nephews mimic voluntarily in order to gain access to the same social status as the Dutch. On the other hand, the Girl mimics because she is forced to do so by the system, even though she also mocks the aristocratic-colonial culture. Her position as a member of the subaltern class means that she will never fully represent the Javanese aristocrat. The Girl only repeats the outer show of the aristocracy's and colonial traditions; she cannot fully represent either. According to Bhabha, mimicry is the act of repeating rather than representing (2004: 125) and what is left is 'the blurred copy' or the trace (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 139). In the process of repeating in the text, the natural authority of the Javanese aristocracy is opened up for inspection and the 'central' culture (Europe-Dutch) is de-centered.

Even though the description of how the nobles mimic the Dutch culture is not quite central in the plot, it is arguable that from a postcolonial perspective this small part is relevant. The Bendoro and his relatives can only ever be partially Dutch and partially Javanese, as they hold on to their non-Western values, such as Islamic values. They can never be Dutch, or Dutch equals, however hard they try because they will only ever be rulers in their immediate native territory. The crucial gap is a structural, ethnic and power distinction, not a matter of culture or of 'not getting it right'. Their ambivalent identity occurs in a process of accepting and rejecting the colonial culture. The indigenous culture is not completely anti-imperialist, as the former culture exists between the self and the 'other'. Therefore, the exchange process creates a unique new culture that reflects the combination of two different cultures. Even though they have adopted and even

internalised a number of Western values, the indigenous people will still obviously have their own distinctive culture. The Girl's new identity does not completely imitate the Javanese aristocratic and colonial construction. Her background as a commoner inherently hampers her ability to become a 'genuine' *priyayi*. She obtains a false identification. Mimicry can only create a blurred copy and ambivalent model of relationship between the colonised and colonisers because the reproduction of the western values and norms will never be accurate. The colonial power always sets things up so the natives will fail – they can never be right because if they were, the crucial distinction between 'them' and 'us' would disappear.

The significance of mBok's effect on the Girl's character is shown when the former leaves the mansion and the Girl grows braver in her criticism of the morality of the ruling class. She openly challenges Mardinah, a member of the lower ranks of the nobility, who takes mBok's place. Mardinah is sent by the Bendoro Putri in Demak with the main responsibility to find a way to remove the Girl from the mansion. In most of the conversations between the Girl and Mardinah, the power of the nobles is reversed in the Girl's hand.

"So you were told to get rid of me, were you? With me out of the way, the Bendoro can marry a noble. Oh well, I'll just stay here [her village]. I'm used to being here. Go back. You'd better not come into my village."

"I'm scared, Mas Nganten."

"Scared? A superior person like you? I thought nobles were better than the rest of us. I'm only a country yokel, but I'm not scared."

"Please don't leave me all by myself, Mas Nganten."

"... I've never realized how frightened city people become, how it frightens a noble, when no one respects them. They're too scared to honour mere villagers." (TG, 102-103)

In her journey back to visit her parents in the village, the Girl expresses all the criticisms she repressed during her stay in the town to Mardinah, who was sent

by the Bendoro to accompany her. They argue about mBok's exile, for example, in a conversation that suggests some of the subtle ways Pramoedya adopts to critique the status quo. For Mardinah, it happened because mBok "forgot how to be a good servant ["to serve, not to criticize"] (*TG*, 103). The Girl irritably replies:

"She [mBok] forgot how to be stupid! My ancestors never served anyone, but they survived. The sea is rich; it provided them with everything they needed." (*TG*, 104)

Then, when Mardinah is shocked to find that fishermen only wear sarongs when they go to the sea because it is the only clothing that they have, the Girl responds:

"Oh? Is that the only thing you say? People like yourself [*sic*] tell me I can't laugh, I mustn't do this and I mustn't do that. And now all you can say is 'oh'? We are poor and as far as city folk are concerned, poverty is a crime. I remember my first days in town. The Bendoro said village people were ignorant. He said we were especially poor because we didn't know anything about religion. ..." (*TG*, 104)

The Girl confronts Mardinah more overtly when Mardinah insults her low-birth and backwardness by mocking her not being able to "read and write" like the other noble ladies (*TG*, 82).

Mardinah was impervious to insult. ...

"... Get out of my room and don't come back in here again! Get out!"

... she [Mardinah] said in a threatening voice: "Commoners don't give orders to nobles. They don't. Ever."

But the Girl waved her hand in front of Mardinah's face and repeated: "Get out!"

Mardinah viciously pushed the Girl's hand away. Immediately the Girl raised her other hand. Then "puh!" and a globule of spittle landed on Mardinah's nose.

All the next week, Mardinah never once set foot in the Girl's room (*TG*, 83).

The Girl's reaction toward oppression represents the reaction of the village community but possibly also echo Pramoedya's own political stance. Though they seem submissive, they actually reject the dominant class' principles. They

only partially give their consent to the nobility's way of life. When they find out that a noble from Demak wants to get rid of the Girl, all of these country folk courageously show their power to break the plan. They are not afraid when Mardinah and the other attendants of the Bendoro Putri in Demak intimidate them by threatening to call the 'police' if they do not let the Girl leave the village. With their own strategy, they are able to expel the attendants from the village and force Mardinah to admit who sent her and why she wants to get rid of the Girl. It is not only the ruling-class people who can give punishment to the ruled, for the commoners also can impose penalties on a noble. Mardinah is forced to marry a commoner, Dul the Story Teller. This turn of events suggests that the hegemony of the aristocrats is in crisis. This also arguably reflects Pramoedya's challenge of Javanese hierarchal power.

“But we're village people, *mak* [mother]. Mardinah comes from town. She wouldn't want a man like him [Dul].”

“It's not such a harsh punishment.”

“Not harsh? Marrying a commoner is the [worst] thing that can happen to a noble, *mak*.” (TG, 154-155)

The changing social order is seen also in other situations. As a commoner, the Girl has endured many 'punishments' or injustices in her life. She endures marriage to a *keris*, being a practice wife of a nobleman who she never known before, leaving her comfort zone and freedom in the village as a child, and doing this and that to be fit as a noble lady. However, when she is forced by the Bendoro to give up her daughter since her 'contract' as a practice wife has ceased, she fights back. She has already been told many times about the convention that her child will belong to the Bendoro.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kuntowijoyo claims that if one of the concubines was expecting a baby, one of them would be divorced to give her place to the pregnant concubine. Nevertheless, when the first pregnant concubine had delivered the baby, she would be divorced as well (2006: 34).

“If the child’s own father won’t touch her, let alone look after her, then she’s better off coming back to the village with her mother.”

The Bendoro sprang to his feet. ... He stood facing the Girl as she bowed her head and stared at the floor.

“I don’t care if you are angry, Bendoro. A baby isn’t a piece of jewellery; ... you just can’t throw her to the first person that comes along.”

“When did you decide to kidnap the child?”

The Girl stared defiantly at him. She slowly stood up, still holding the baby to her body.

“A hen will defend her chickens, Bendoro. And I’m more than hen. I’m human being!! Even if I can’t chant a single word of scripture!” (*TG*, 179-180)

When the Girl wants to take the child, the Bendoro runs after her and asks his servants to stop her. He even threatens the Girl with the words ‘police’ and ‘constabulary’. When ideological ‘consent’ is in crisis, the ruling class will use ‘force’ to defend their position. As the Girl keeps on defending her child, she encounters a physical attack and she starts ‘bleeding’ (*TG*, 180). The Girl has put up a remarkable struggle, using her body to defend her rights and resist oppression, but she fails. After being expelled from the Bendoro’s house, the Girl decides not to return to her fishing village or to stay in Rembang. She goes to a new place, Blora, in which she may become a free person with a new identity.

In *The Girl*, Pramoedya voices his concern about the class system in Javanese elites, particularly through the characters of mBok and the Girl. In this I have argued that he is influenced by the political ideology of *Lekra* which is to “abolish the class system and raise the consciousness of the masses” (Hellwig, 1994: 70). As a socialist realist writer, he uses the history of his maternal grandmother, his mother and Kartini to criticise the social injustice and gender inequality rooted in the colonial and Javanese elites’ system. He also criticises the *priyayi*’s mentality that tends to be hypocritical (Kurniawan, 2002: 136). On the one hand, they purport to be very religious, but they use their superior position to oppress the lower classes.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WOMEN'S IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE IN *COONARDOO*

This chapter discusses women's representation and resistance in *Coonardoo*. As with the Girl, Coonardoo's subjectivity is subordinated by the combined effects of patriarchal and colonial systems. Whilst *The Girl* deals with class conflict, the main issue in *Coonardoo* is gender and racial conflict. As with Pramodya's novel, Prichard's main character shows her compliance, but in her silence, she confronts the long history of oppression endured by Indigenous Australian women. The depiction of Coonardoo's identity and resistance in the text will be connected to its Australian socio-historical contexts.

To assist Indonesian readers who might not be quite familiar with *Coonardoo*, I would like to briefly outline the story.

#### **Plot Summary of *Coonardoo***

This novel describes life on Wyaliba cattle station where the Watt family, a white family who owns the station, live alongside a group of Gnarler Aboriginal people who work for them (Beasley, 1964: 36). The Gnarler people are very attached to this land which they regard as theirs. The settlers behave as if they are superior to the native people, and directly or indirectly, they contribute to the destruction of the culture of the Gnarler people, even though Bessie Watt is against any Christian mission working with the station Aborigines.

Since early childhood, the young Aboriginal woman Coonardoo has been controlled by Bessie and taught to work for the Watt family, even after Bessie has passed away. Coonardoo is a personal servant, a cook and cleaner and works in

the paddocks as well. This position gives her some status with her people and allows her free access to the station and its resources. However, although Bessie grows very fond of Coonardoo, who effectively assimilates to the ways of the white people, she cannot entirely accept or take her from her people and her tradition.

Bessie herself has mixed views about Indigenous people. While she stresses to her son, Hugh, that he must not take a gin (black woman) as his wife as is commonly done by white men on other stations, she would rather he took up with a gin than with a white woman who cannot survive living in the outback. When she passes away, Hugh is very depressed and relies on Coonardoo for comfort. After a single sexual encounter between them, Hugh is sick and leaves for the nearest town. Neither of them realizes at that point that they have a son, as he was born when Coonardoo was married to Warieda, an Aboriginal man. On his return to Wyaliba, Hugh brings Mollie, a white woman, as his wife. Her presence on the station brings more sorrow to Coonardoo because Mollie enslaves her more than ever. Furthermore, when Mollie discovers Hugh and Coonardoo have a 'half-caste' child, she asks Hugh to send Coonardoo and Winnie away from the station. However, Hugh finds it impossible to expel them, since Coonardoo's role in Wyaliba is indispensable. Mollie leaves Hugh, taking her daughters with her and when Coonardoo's tribal husband, Warieda, passes away, Hugh takes Coonardoo as his woman after buying her from Warieda's brother. However, Hugh's white prejudice prevents him from treating Coonardoo as a partner, a lover or a wife. Coonardoo is very upset and confused.

Sam Geary, a white master from Nuniewarra station who has yearned for Coonardoo for a long time, now takes advantage of her sexual hunger. Sam is the opposite of Hugh. He abuses Aboriginal women for his sexual needs and

exploits Aboriginal men as unpaid workers. While Hugh is away, Sam visits and claims from Coonardoo sexual favours as part of her obligations to provide hospitality. The latter accepts him because of her 'hunger' and possibly her disappointment with Hugh's denial of her. When he finds out about the scandal, Hugh furiously attacks Coonardoo, severely injuring her in a fire. Expelled from the station, Coonardoo is trapped into prostitution through which she gets venereal disease. When she leaves, everything in Wyaliba loses its soul. Bankruptcy forces Hugh to give up Wyaliba to Sam. Finally, in a weak condition, Coonardoo returns to Wyaliba and dies there in the land where she was born.

### **Women's representation in *Coonardoo***

A careful investigation of the representation of Aboriginal women in *Coonardoo* is needed, as it is not easy to find Australian Indigenous women's representation in history, anthropological resources or even in literary work. As we saw earlier, Melissa Lucashenko asserts that "if Aboriginal Australians have been invisible generally, then this has been doubly true for Aboriginal women" (2011: 378). Lucashenko further argues that, "those few images of Aboriginal life that do permeate mainstream consciousness usually are those of Aboriginal men ..." (2011, 378-79). If, on some occasions Aboriginal women are visible, their existence is interpreted and written from the perspective of European people, both men and women, and from Aboriginal male perspectives. Indeed, critical resources are mostly male-written documents. In fact, Australia was a male-dominated society prior to and after colonialism. In the 1970s feminist writers worked to overcome discrimination but they were nearly all white women speaking in the terms of white middle-class society (Saunders and Evans, 1992: 3).

In *Coonardoo*, the central role to given Aboriginal women, amidst the overlay of patriarchal and colonial subjugation, reflects some of the political concerns of Prichard's writing. Coonardoo is described as a strong Aboriginal woman who can endure living in the outback dealing with some patriarchal and colonial expected roles. Prichard was the first Australian writer who took Aboriginal characters seriously in her dual role: a tribal wife and mother as well as a devoted 'servant' in the station (Drake-Brockman, 1967: 26). This part of the thesis will look at how Coonardoo is represented in a certain historical period in patriarchal colonial society that serves as the setting for the story in the novel.

In many historical sources, Indigenous Australian women are stereotypically seen as "sexual objects and fair game for white men; as members of a subject people they were also victims of the whole range of indignities bestowed by a brutal invading colonialism which considered itself to be the master race" (Summers, 1980: 276). It is as if they live in the 'shadows', unseen and thus unimportant. The word 'shadows' plays an important role in the narrative, since the meaning of Coonardoo is "the well in the shadows" or "the dark well" (C, 2). Raina claims that it represents three aspects: Coonardoo's dark colour, "the deeper aspects of [her] personality for she is always calm, composed and without anger" as well as a well that Hugh can drink from and satisfy his thirst in his whole life (2010: 98). The word 'thirst' in the last point implies 'sexual desire'. Corbould states that Coonardoo's name, the well in the shadow, implies her source of "the white-man-made source of relief, like water to land" (1999: 421).

Some 'accepted labels' of Aboriginal people can be found in *Coonardoo*. These are "dark" (C, 61), "childlike" (C, 61), "poor degraded wretches" (C, 100), "treated worse than dogs" (C, 100), "dirty" (C, 105), "diseased" (C, 100, 197), "ill-

natured" (C, 100), "filthy" (C, 104, 105), "treacherous" (C, 104, 105), "wild" (C, 105), and "repulsive" (C, 171). These cultural codes are revealed through one of the scenes involving Saul Hardy, Hugh and Hugh's wife (Mollie) when they are debating the native's stereotypes. Prichard develops this scene to show Mollie's mistaken view of Aboriginal people (Thomas, 1987: 235). Mollie has absorbed the colonial doctrine that Aborigines are "filthy and treacherous [and] it was a divine right of white men to ride rough-shod over anything aboriginal which stood in their way" (C, 104). Her racial prejudices are shown to be "obstinate [and] mindless" (*ibid*). Hugh and Hardy believe that the images of the Aborigines as vengeful and treacherous are "an explicable response to white usurpation of hunting grounds and women, violation of aboriginal attitudes to conservation of food supply, murder of blacks, and savagery in punitive expeditions and blackbirding" (1987: 235). Thomas suggests that through Bessie's character, Prichard implicitly shows what anthropologists would call an 'emic' perspective of Aboriginal culture (1987: 235). This is "a view in which the observer attempts to comprehend the social realities of an 'alien' culture through its own eyes" (Pertti J. Pelto and Gretel H. Pelto in Thomas, *ibid*).

Moreover, Aboriginal women's identification in the text reflects the accepted images found in the notes of white women who lived in the outback. For instance, Coonardoo is portrayed as "child-like" (C, 61) who only has good skills after being taught by Bessie. She also needs to be supervised closely to conduct simple domestic tasks, as she is unreliable when she is first taught to do some white people's jobs such as washing the dishes with boiling water and making soap. Her perceived laziness and slowness in doing her jobs in the house irritate Bessie who then attempts to discipline Coonardoo (C, 11). The scenes of disciplining the

Aborigines throughout the text reiterate a hierarchy of races that is typical of colonialism (Corbould, 1999: 421). This, by implication, preserves the hierarchal stereotype that white Australians have the responsibility to civilise Indigenous Australians. Corbould claims that Prichard does not highlight the fact that “the gross inequality of the labour exchange” plays an important role in the constructed image of the undisciplined Aborigines (1999: 422). As a child, Coonardoo spends most of her time playing like other Aboriginal children in the camp. Thus, she thinks that her new jobs are like a “new game she was playing” (C, 10). Nobody tells her that she is going to be a ‘child-worker’ in the homestead doing white people’s jobs. These ideas are very alien to her and when it happens, her childhood is suddenly shifted into an adult white world. Furthermore, Coonardoo herself is depicted as a “shy little, graceful little creature” (C, 7). She and other Gnarler women also love to “gossip”, “laugh” and are often “giggling” (C, 50, 83). For example, they gossip about Sheba (C, 51), how to pronounce Mollie’s name in Aborigines’ tongue (Mulli), and comment on Mollie’s beautiful gown (C, 83).

Despite the previous stereotyped-image of Aboriginal women, I argue that Prichard voices her concern for Aboriginal people in *Coonardoo*. It is obviously seen in her Foreword:

People who see the blacks only along the transcontinental line, or when they have become poor, degraded and degenerate creatures, as a result of contact with towns and the vices of white people, cannot understand how different they are in their natural state, or on isolated stations of the Nor’-West where they are treated with consideration and kindness (C, v).

Throughout the narrative, Prichard challenges some constructed racial differences. For instance, despite the common images of Aboriginal people as being ‘dark, black and dirty’, Prichard shows Hugh’s admiration of Coonardoo’s beauty. Coonardoo is said to have “pretty hands”, “elegant and delicate the slim brown

fingers”, and pretty “small brown feet which were as straight and well-shaped as her hands” (C, 68, 92). Also, Prichard inverts a common myth by claiming that for Aborigines, “white men are cannibals, particularly the parsons”, since the latter believe that white people eat the real “body and blood of Christ ... in the Blessed Sacrament” (C, 106). Most significantly, Prichard presents the idea that Aboriginal people and their traditions can survive under colonialism. No matter how hard the settlers attempt to subjugate the land and the people, they are shown to fail in the end. Most white people, women in particular, cannot live in Wyaliba, which remains Aboriginal land. Only those who can ‘keep in tune’ or assimilate with nature and Aboriginal ways of life can survive. The settlers who can survive negotiate their interests with those of the Aborigines. Those who do not, do not last: Jessica, Mollie and, eventually, Hugh have to leave Wyaliba because they cannot accommodate ways commonly practised in the outback. Hugh, in particular, is seen as ‘defeated’ by nature and by his failure to accept an Aboriginal concept of sexuality, leading to his estrangement from Coonardoo. In contrast, even though Coonardoo has been abandoned and becomes a victim of colonisation, at the end of the narrative, she survives and finds her way back to Wyaliba using her ‘instinctual knowledge’ and finally dies on her native land (C, 204).

Prichard also depicts Gnarler women in Wyaliba station, and Coonardoo in particular, as different from other Aboriginal women living in up-country towns and settlements along the coast. Coonardoo is depicted as a “clean straight [Aboriginal] woman” who has “pride, dignity and grace” (C, 204). She is also shown as “handsome and spirited” (C, 25) and more intelligent than other Gnarler women (C, 7). Unfortunately, after Hugh sends her away from Wyaliba, at the end of the narrative, Coonardoo is described in the same terms as other Aboriginal women:

one of the “remnants of a dying race” (*C*, 100), “alienated from her tribal laws and customs” (*C*, 100), the “black pearl of a pearler’s crew” (*C*, 204), and a prostitute “rotten with disease, and booked for the island” (*C*, 197). It is through Coonardoo’s body that the contest between the settlers and the Aboriginal people over land and values is symbolised. There is a common discourse that the Noble Aborigine stayed pure in the bush and was corrupted when mixing with whites. Patty O’Brien asserts that the shifting of Coonardoo’s representation from a member of a noble race to a diseased race justifies the settler to take possession of the land and thus leaves the Indigenous people doomed (in Noble, 2005: 56).

Prichard’s sympathy is also reflected in Bessie’s attitude toward the Gnarler people which is quite complex. On the one hand, Bessie seems to be able to perceive the difference between her culture and that of the Aborigine. She does not overload the Gnarler people with work beyond their capacity. She sets working hours for them so that “after midday, ..., they never do a tap” (*C*, 91). The relationship between Bessie and the natives is not altogether that between a master and workers. Unlike Mollie, who asks Coonardoo and other Gnarler women to call her ‘ma’am’, Bessie does not mind when Gnarler people address her as ‘Mumae’. Also, she believes that to survive in the frontier, one should assimilate with outback values. She even prefers a gin as Hugh’s wife to white women with ‘poor spirit’ like Jessica (*C*, 39, 58) and believes in the Aboriginal myth of the white cockatoo. She warns Gnarler people to take care of Hugh otherwise she will come back and haunt them through the white cockatoos (*C*, 31). Furthermore, she claims to be different from other white station masters by not letting any missionaries on to Wyaliba (*C*, 13). Her aim is that “[Aborigines] on Wyaliba should remain [Aborigines]”, so she lets the natives practise their tribal laws and beliefs (*C*, 13). In fact, the Aboriginal



customs that became the major focus of missionaries were particularly “the practise of polygamy, infant and youthful betrothal to older men, sexual ‘promiscuity’ and violence of men towards women” (Tony Scanlon in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 31).

On the other hand, in her sympathy towards the natives, Bessie still shows her dislike of Aboriginal traditions, particularly those dealing with sexuality (C, 20). As with the missionaries, Bessie disapproves of polygamy, child-brides and male sexual violence towards Aboriginal women. Even though she has been living with the Gnarler people for a long time, Bessie’s “white woman’s prejudices are still intact” (C, 20). Veronica Brady asserts that she is “typical of a colonial culture that thinks itself free to reject everything that is other than itself and with it the embarrassment of trying to relate to what is unknown and different” (2004: 6). Prichard “dramatizes through the responses of Mrs. Bessie Watt, Hugh Watt and Saul Hardy to [Aboriginal] culture and experience of cross-cultural contact the rationality of the emic approach over an approach informed by white cultural prejudice”, particularly “concerning sex, sexuality and initiation to sexual adulthood” (Thomas, 1987: 235). For example, regarding the religious rituals, Bessie is torn between her effort to respect the natives and her white woman’s prejudice. At first, she finds the rituals to be “disgusting” (C, 24) and “immoral” (C, 20). The next phase is the moment when she realises the different viewpoints between her people and that of the Aborigines (C, 20-21). However, upon her visit to the corroboree site, she finds that she cannot accept this Other world (Thomas, 1987: 236).

Part of the shadows, sitting there in the dark, she had glimpsed another world, the world mystic, elusive, sensual and vital of this primitive people’s imagination. A presentiment of being part of the shadows, of the infinite spaces about her, and of the ceremonial dance itself, she banished peremptorily (C, 22).

So, Prichard cannot completely banish the racial superiority shared by most of her white readers at the time.

In *Coonardoo*'s Foreword, Prichard also endorses the stereotypes of Aboriginal people as having a lower racial status: "the Australian Aboriginal stands somewhere near the bottom rung of the great evolutionary ladder we have ascended" (C, v-vi). Thus, Aboriginals are frequently related to animals in the text. For instance, Coonardoo is portrayed as "a faithful deserted animal" (C, 7) and "minx" (C, 27) with "wild eyes" (C, 203) who uses her 'animal instinct' to trace her "breeding" (C, 204). Her eyes are depicted as like "birds which had a nest there, so the hovered and whirled around the place [Wyaliba]" (C, 72). Prichard also compares the instinctual ability of Aboriginal people to the White people's intelligence and their ability to reason. For instance, Coonardoo instinctively predicts the homecoming of Hugh with a white woman as his wife (C, 69, 77, 78). Also, Winni, the son of Coonardoo and Hugh, is shown to have both instinctive wisdom as his Aboriginal heritage and reasoning as his white man's legacy (C, 133). In this way Prichard could be said to be commenting on a perceived new Australian indigeneity, one born of a joining of both European and Indigenous genetic and cultural threads.

It is through the tensions between Aboriginal and European systems that Coonardoo's identity is constructed. Coonardoo's life is torn between two places: her people's *uloo* (the native camp), itself subject to patriarchy, and her white master's station, representing both patriarchy and colonialism. These two places shape Coonardoo's identity, and in these places, she also knows how to position herself. In this way, she recalls Hall's concept of identity as a negotiation between

being positioned and positioning ourselves within society (1990: 225). Coonardoo's identity is framed by two 'scripts': an Aboriginal shared history and ancestry which continue to speak to her, and a new colonial identity coming from an alien world which creates a subject that can be 'spoken'. In the meeting point of two different cultures, Coonardoo links the homestead to the *uloo* by learning and negotiating with the Europeans. Having this ability, Aboriginal women "emerge as crucial to the survival process" (Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 25). Similarly, Kossew asserts that Bessie's settler predicament positions Coonardoo as an indigenous 'other' who acts as the settler's link to the land and to belonging. However, Kossew asserts, "the contact between settler and 'other' has already irrevocably changed indigenous culture" (1997: 39). Wyaliba is the ancestral home for Coonardoo and her people: the Gnarler tribe. However, the land has been taken over by the settlers, Bessie's family, who bring European values. So, Coonardoo and her people are strangers in their own land. It is on the space of their ancestral land that the tensions and negotiation between two different cultures occur. Significantly, since they are depicted as "dirty" (C, 105), Coonardoo and other Gnarler women are required to perform a 'ritual' bathing every day before they go into the homestead (C 17, 78, 81, 82). They have to wash because the whites think that they are dirty from living in the camp. Entering the European world, the Gnarler women are required to espouse the value of cleanliness. Moreover, they must wear dresses, which they called *gina-gina*, every time they work in the house (C, 17). In the text, *gina-gina* is defined as a gown-like kimono (C, 83). After finishing their duties, they hang the *gina-gina* in the shade shed and go back to their camp. Interestingly, this style of dress is also worn by Mollie, Hugh's wife, although hers are more beautiful (C, 83). *Gina-gina* and ritual bathing symbolise the gap

between the whites and the natives. Whenever the natives are in the white's territory, they are supposed to mimic the white's ways, yet they turn back to their own ways upon returning to their camp. This seemingly inevitable situation reveals that the colonial subject will only be a 'partial' or 'incomplete' presence (Bhabha, 2004: 123). Interestingly, upon Bessie's death, Coonardoo continues to perform the bathing ritual even though Hugh never requires her to do so (C, 82).

At the start of the narrative, the narrator describes young Coonardoo as a cheerful little girl who enjoys the freedom of her childhood. She spends her time singing and playing around the camp with her native friends and Hugh, the son of her mistress. Her childhood is suddenly truncated by Bessie's decision to take her into the homestead after Hugh leaves and her freedom curtailed as she is put to child labour. She no longer "[chases] the hens, [sits] to sing under the white blossom-tree, or [runs] to play with Bardi and Wanna, in the morning, when she should have been busy in the house" (C, 11). She is trained in the ways of white people so that she can look after Hugh after Bessie passes away. Bessie teaches Coonardoo "to read, write and count" (C, 7); "to wash dishes with boiling water, making the soap froth and foam; sweep the veranda and bedrooms, dining-room and sitting-room" (C, 10); "to cook and sew, be clean and tidy" (C, 24) as well as "[to make] a note ... in the store- book" (C, 134). Coonardoo works all day in the homestead, and sleeps with her people at night. But having been educated in white ways, Coonardoo is different from the rest of the native women. She takes care of white people in the homestead as well as her own people in the *uloo*. Coonardoo also has the ability to deal with white people that other Gnarler people do not. For example, when Hugh is sick, "Coonardoo who had learnt the ways of white people since she was a child, cared for Hugh as she had seen Mumae care for him when he was a small boy" (C,

65). However, there are less welcome consequences from being ‘bound’ in service to settler culture. Coonardoo’s knowledge of white ways alienates her from her own culture.

Coonardoo’s early entry into adult labour in the homestead is matched by her early entry to adulthood in Aboriginal culture. As mentioned earlier, as ‘child-labourer’ she is separated from her community. She also moves into an ‘early adulthood’ in a different way in her tradition. At ten years old, an age which is otherwise regarded as being still part of childhood, Meenie introduces the idea of womanhood to Coonardoo. Coonardoo starts learning the responsibility of being an adult based on her people’s tradition. She is betrothed as a ‘child-wife’. In both situations – entering marriage and being a labourer in the homestead – Coonardoo loses her freedom as a child. However, what is interesting is that Coonardoo’s feeling toward ‘child-marriage’ traditions is depicted as less shocking than when Bessie suddenly changes her freedom to play into full-time labour. In the latter situation, described as “scowling and sulky, eyes averted” (C, 11), Coonardoo is like a girl who has just lost something that she loves. In contrast, when she is betrothed, she is like a child who has just received a gift. When she goes into the first process of womanhood, Coonardoo is partly “shy and little afraid” (C, 19) and partly “filled with excitement and mystery” (C, 20). She sits in the middle of men who are eligible to marry her, including Warieda. They sing about her breasts to prepare her to be a woman. As a potential man for Coonardoo, Warieda has the privilege to develop Coonardoo as a woman by moving his hands around her breasts, moulding and kneading them (C, 20).<sup>20</sup> Prior to this ritual,

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<sup>20</sup> Phylis M. Kaberry explains that the singing of magical spells is necessary to hasten the development of puberty such as making the breasts develop (2004: 97).

some older women inform Coonardoo that her body has shown signs of puberty: “her breasts begun to thrust themselves out from her slim up-right body” (C, 19). So, Coonardoo steps out from an Aboriginal girl in child-labour and transforms into a woman. She experiences physical and mental journeys determined by colonial and Aboriginal societies in her surroundings.

Coonardoo’s different reactions toward the two transitions in her childhood may be explained by Philis Mary Kaberry’s view that the transition from childhood to a situation where a girl enters marriage is not an abrupt one, and “that she has been in some measure prepared for it” (2004: 91). Kaberry further notes:

As soon as the Girl and boy can speak, they begin to learn terms for affinal relatives. A girl calls all the men husband, who stand in the relationship of mother’s mother’s brother’s daughter’s son, or father’s father’s sister’s son’s son to her; ... But she does not view them ... as a battalion of possible husbands. The classificatory terms indicate potential relationships, and it is realized that only one of these will be actualized for the individual; distinctions are made if only for the reason that some of the men are very old, or married or affianced (2004: 91-92).

Also, the Girl has been familiar “with the general routine of family life associated with the procuring and distributing of food” and “has some knowledge of sex” (Kaberry, 2004: 92-93). Even though Prichard does not depict these aspects in detail, some parts of the novel show how Meenie shapes Coonardoo’s awareness that she will soon be a woman and that being Warieda’s wife will give happiness (C, 7, 14).

In fact, ‘childhood’ is a historical construction – tied to place, time, class and culture. Prichard constructs the tension of the different concepts of childhood in European and Aboriginal standard through Coonardoo’s body. Yet, Prichard shows Bessie’s inconsistency, as on the one hand she opposes Coonardoo’s ‘child-marriage’, but on the other hand she exploits Coonardoo’s labour value. So, what we

think of as 'natural' for a ten-year old, as a 'natural age to marry or to work' are all culturally and historically conditioned.

However, it is also undeniable that Indigenous Australians have a strong patriarchal tradition. As Ann McGrath states, Aboriginal society was patriarchal because men's business such as men's cults and male associations are valued more importantly than the women's. Men also had the ultimate power over women that they could preserve through the threat of violence (1987: 57). In the novel, when Coonardoo was a child, she was promised to Warieda to be his woman (C, 14). It is not immediately obvious whether her father, Joey Koonarra, promises Coonardoo to Warieda or not. However, the following quotation from the text implies that Coonardoo's father has played a role in the arrangement. This common tradition shows how patriarchal system is quite strong in Aboriginal society.

From her birth every girl was destined to pass, ..., within defined lines of tarloo and descent to mateship with one of her kinsmen. Families on the creek were Banniga, Burong, Baldgery and Kurrimurra. A Banniga woman might be given to a man who was Kurrimurra. Their child would be Burong and could not mate with either a Banniga or a Kurrimurra. Beyond that there was room for choice. The men who were nuba, or nova, to her might never touch her; but they were permissible husbands in case of the death, or absence of the man to whom her father had given her (C, 21).

Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown whose fieldwork included the Kimberly region states that "marriage is with a tribal second cousin, either mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, or father's father's sister's son's daughter" (in Kaberry, 2004: 46). This explains why Burong, a child from a Banniga woman and a Kurrimurra man, cannot marry either a Banniga or a Kurrimurra, since the latter is the tribal first cousin for Burong. Concerning the marriage arrangement, Nancy M. Williams and Leslie Jolly further argue:

There are reports from many parts of Australia that Aboriginal people arranged marriages through a 'promise' system. The local details vary, but usually some

ceremony would mark the agreement that a certain man would marry the child of a certain woman. Sometimes the child would not yet be born, or even conceived, at the time of this ceremony. So many women were much younger than their first husband and this was probably a political disadvantage to these women (1992: 16).

The quotations depict children, girls in particular such as Coonardoo, as passive objects. Williams and Jolly suggest that “young people of both sexes were not influential in the arrangement of marriages ...” (1992: 16). In contrast to the Girl’s reactions in Pramodya’s novel, Coonardoo’s feelings about this arrangement are not clearly depicted. It is Meenie, Warieda’s first wife, who keeps telling her that being Warieda’s woman assures happiness. Meenie functions as a guide shaping Coonardoo’s consciousness to meet social expectations. Even though her function is not profoundly depicted compared to Bessie, both of them occupy supporting roles to take the characters from one status to another.

Meenie had told Coonardoo, and talked to her so that Coonardoo was filled with pride and pleasant anticipation at the thought of being the wife of Warieda. Was he not a strong man, young fellow, good-looking and powerful, the best horse-breaker in the Nor’-West, everybody said (C, 14).

However, this arrangement is opposed by Bessie. Getting married before the age of sixteen years old goes against European standards. Bessie interferes with the native tradition by asking Warieda to postpone the marriage for three years until Coonardoo turns sixteen years old (C, 15). In return, Warieda receives “a horse and new blankets” (C, 15). The negotiation over Coonardoo’s body recalls Katrak’s idea of female body experiencing ‘internalized exile’ in which “the body feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it, and has no agency” (2006: 2), for that is the position occupied by Coonardoo. Considering themselves to have a superior culture, morality and economics, white station-owners feel that they have right to interfere with the native matters. Similarly, although at



first Warieda shows his opposition to Bessie's plan in his "gloomed and hung sullen and heavy" face, "he grinned obligingly" upon hearing the goods he will get (C, 15-16). On the one hand, we can read this as a 'feminist' saving a fellow female from patriarchy, but in noting that Bessie is the station boss and referred to by the Gnarler as 'Mumae' – the sound mimicking 'mummy' in English but means father in their dialect (C, 3, 92) – but we must also see it as competition between white and black patriarchies for possession of the black woman. In this situation, Coonardoo has been doubly trapped in colonial and patriarchal conditions. These ideologies work hand in hand in making women into objects of trade. The coming of colonialism creates more pain for women, as it intensifies "women's subordination [and] patriarchal relations in colonial lands" (Loomba, 2002: 167). Having the status as father in the Aboriginal dialect, the 'obedience' of Warieda and other Gnarler people to Bessie's interference is not surprising. Although Meenie and Warieda dispute the idea, neither of them is willing to oppose her directly. After her husband died, Bessie had been a father and a mother to Hugh and the woman master of Wyaliba. As Warieda notes, he "was almost amused to see Mumae, the woman who was like a man, as he thought of her, so concerned and making terms with him" (C, 15-16).

Bessie's strong disapproval of Coonardoo's marriage is partly influenced by the fact that Coonardoo is her 'daughter', as it were. Heseltine argues that "there is ... a hint ... that Ted [Bessie's husband] may have seduced Maria [Coonardoo's mother]" (1979: 26-27). Ellis is also doubtful that the cause of Maria's death is because the shooting of Maria's dog: "it is possible to assume that Ted Watt could be or is in fact the father of Coonardoo" by comparing "the two violent acts of Ted and his son Hugh against Maria and her daughter Coonardoo respectively" (1995:

64-65). Noble also says that “Hugh and Coonardoo share the same white father ... and are in fact half-brother and sister” (2005: 58). Therefore, even though the narrator does not describe an affair between Ted and Maria before both of them died, the depiction of Bessie who “had taken the affair of Maria to heart” (C, 7) and “held her tongue” (C, 8) lends further weight to the assumption of the nature of the relationship between Ted and Maria. Bessie’s involvement in Coonardoo’s marriage arrangement indicates that she is unwilling to allow Aboriginal tradition to dominate Coonardoo’s life. Prichard constructs a clear cultural clash in the text:

... she was jealous of an influence on the child greater than her own. She did not wish to lose Coonardoo. Her people did not wish to lose Coonardoo either. She was theirs by blood and bone, and they were weaving her to earth and to themselves, through all her senses, appetites and instincts (C, 24).

There is an obvious contrast of instinctual qualities of the native, and by implication non-Indigenous we are led to believe that Australians have more elevated and rational values and traditions. If the parentage myth is true, there is an incest taboo that prevents Coonardoo and Hugh marrying as previously described by Radcliffe-Brown.

Coonardoo is thus torn between two ‘bonds’ – not to say double burdens: her people’s tradition and her white master/mother’s ideal. As with the Girl, Coonardoo is not involved at all in these arrangements. The two characters’ passiveness emphasises their lack of agency and lack of control over their bodies. These characters feel alienated in both their old and new world. In Katrak’s term, “bodily relocations often lead to mental states of exile and non-belonging” (2006: 124).

The tension between the colonial and patriarchal power over Coonardoo’s body reveals how the frontier is often “violent, lawless and dominated by European men”, particularly in terms of rape and prostitution for women (Jebb and

Haebich, 1992: 23). The fight is not only between Warieda and another Aboriginal man but also between Bessie and Sam. Here, Prichard constructs a scene where during the chaos Coonardoo is 'saved' by Bessie who locks Coonardoo in the homestead bathroom at night for weeks after the day when Sam's men attempt to kidnap her (C, 26). Life in the station has made Aborigines dependent on white people in economic and social aspects. McGrath asserts that "the fearful frontier conditions [increased] women's vulnerability to rape and abduction unless under the patronage of an employer" (in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 25). This situation encourages Aboriginal women to remain on the stations (McGrath in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 25). Bell argues that station life served "the institutionalization of settlement life which created households wherein [Aboriginal] women were dependents" (in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 33).

McGrath argues that "working the station economy and way of life provided Aboriginal people with the social and economic context for accommodation" (in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 25). Before the coming of colonisation, Indigenous Australians had their old way of living in the bush, hunting for animals, collecting raw material, as well as gathering food and medicine from the nature (Williams and Jolly, 1992: 14). Coonardoo and Gnarler people experience displacement in a new system of exchange symbolised by the store, labour, clothes and other commodities. They become accustomed to life on a station that offers reliable sources of food such as flour, sugar and tea. Consequently, their strong dependency puts them in a difficult situation when Bessie dies and Hugh's illness makes him leave Wyaliba. Rather than disobey Bessie's message not to take anything from the homestead without asking, Gnarler people prefer to go hungry, waiting for Hugh (C, 73) and on his return, Hugh describes them as "half starved"

(C, 79). Their consent to colonial system leads to their incorporating Bessie into their own (as a spirit cockatoo) with the result that they are doubly dominated.

Being set in an isolated, rural, and ‘womanless’ world with strong female characters makes the story of *Coonardoo* unusual. Here, masculinity is celebrated in the place “where congenial mateship and tough living prevailed” (Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 20). Bush values such as male courage and physical strength are essential to survive and do the work typical on the frontier, such as dogging, droving and working the land before the machine replaced man power. Noble explains that in *Coonardoo* “The fit and able male body signifies strength, power and sexuality” (2005: 26). Therefore, when there is a woman who can endure the life of the outback, such as Bessie, her quality is respected yet spoilt by the perception that she is “like a man” (C, 15-16). Historian Miriam Dixson has suggested that the masculine flavour of social life in Australia leaves limited opportunities for women to display “achievement-drive, initiative, autonomy, true dignity, confidence and courage” in everyday life (1976: 22). Living in the ‘womanless’ space in the outback requires women to ‘mimic’ masculine values. Not all white women are sufficiently fit and strong to survive the hard and lonely life in the North-West (C, 58, 118). Prichard masculinises Bessie and Phylis as the female survivors in the outback. Jessica and Mollie, who remain feminine, are beaten by the bush and choose to leave Wyaliba. Coonardoo herself is also often described as a man, for example, “good man” (C, 32), “handsome” (C, 25), “slight and lithe as a boy” (C, 32) and “a good horse girl” (C, 14). McGrath claims that “horse-riding was increasingly taken over as a man-only role although there were some skilful horse-rider women” (in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 25).

As with other patriarchal societies, the division of labour in Aboriginal

communities is different for men and women. Women mostly deal with domestic jobs such as “land carers, environmental guides and teachers of children” (Diane Bell in Williams and Jolly, 1992: 12) and hunting in a larger scale belongs to men (Saunders and Evans, 1992: 4). However, from Williams and Jolly’s description below, we can see that Aboriginal women also carried out their economic activity in a public space:

Women went out daily in groups that included some children to hunt small animals and fish, and to gather foods and wild honey, yams, lilies and grass seeds. Unlike the men, because they went out daily, they could be sure of bringing something home. Along the way they might collect raw materials for making string, baskets, and other utensils, and dyes for decorating them. Medicinal herbs were also gathered, and ochre sometimes quarried. ... for most of the time, women spent their days with other women and often with children who were thus taught by women about their country and the correct way to behave in it (1992: 14).

Wendy Beck and Leslie Head argue that “hunting and gathering were essentially ‘bread-winning’ roles, the former being more prestigious, but the latter more dependable and sustaining (in Saunders and Evans, 1992: 4). In *Coonardoo*, the Gnarler women also perform these conventional tasks, particularly when the station owner is absent from the station. While men are “hunting kangaroos, sharing bungarra and the birds”, “the gins husked and pounded grass seeds or dug for coolyahs [wild sweet potatoes]” (C, 73, 207). Unlike the Girl who can only escape from her oppressed milieu when she visits the village, Coonardoo still has spaces to escape to, male roles and the bush. Prichard shows how women act as teacher and environmental guide when Coonardoo explains to her children the places she has been: “behind the hills where the sun went down [which are] blue as the dungaree of a new *gina-gina* they were, very far away, mysterious and impenetrable, with trees curled thick as the hair on your [her children] head all over them”, “through trees and trees”, “up and down the steep hillsides, along them and the dry creek

beds”, “the horses she and Warieda had chased”, and “the rock holes by which they had camped” (C, 32). Elsewhere in the novel we read that she even performs this traditional role for her master’s children: “And as for Coonardoo, she loved to walk off with one of Mollie’s babies, and spend the afternoon in the shade of the creek trees singing to her; telling the children stories, making tracks for them in the sand, showing them how to copy the footprints of wild turkey, kangaroo and dingoes” (C, 110).

Furthermore, the dominance of masculine values and paternal power plays an important part in valuing a son more than a daughter. Both colonial and Aboriginal societies secure property through transmission of the male lines. Gnarler people have a system that children will be men’s “property” and “added to the men’s sense of power and importance”(C, 21).<sup>21</sup> Even when a husband lends his wife to ‘a distinguished stranger’ or ‘visitor’ in the camp, a child from this hospitality-based relationship will be his. Aboriginal people “do not associate the birth of children with any casual sex relationship” (C, 21). For example, when Coonardoo delivers Winni, her son with Hugh, Warieda is very proud of having him (C, 75). Prior to this, Warieda is disappointed when Coonardoo gives him daughters (C, 28). Similarly, in settler society, the desire to have a son is very strong, as it is more beneficial in the colonial frontier. As with Warieda, Hugh is also disappointed when he has five daughters: “a son ... would have more belonged to him” (C, 108). His love for his ‘son’, Winni, is much deeper than that for his ‘true’ daughters (C, 108). He views his daughter as “less real”, much less than Winni (C, 108). Society’s demands makes Mollie feel guilty: “But a man needs a son. Hugh wants a

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<sup>21</sup> Kaberry asserts that it is the right of the Aboriginal men “to claim any children that are born as his own” (2004: 131).

companion in his old age, to work with him, and to hand on Wyaliba ..." (C, 110). Dixon explains: "From the preverbal stages of childhood ... Australian girls begin to acquire a kind of gut knowledge that they are 'outsiders'" (1976: 21).

Male power in the text is also revealed when Coonardoo is exchanged for some goods in her marriage arrangement. Wherever patriarchy dominates social relations, women and women's rights are given a negotiated value such as the dowry system. This is shown during the negotiation of Bessie and Warieda as well as Sam and Coonardoo's father in return for Coonardoo. In the text, this system is described as normal among the natives. So, Bessie buys into this way of thinking in negotiating for Coonardoo's rights. These situations show that Coonardoo is of no more worth than these commodities. Coonardoo and other Gnarler women seem as unaffected by such arrangements, however. Robert Hughes illustrates the traditional gender relations:

[An Aboriginal girl] was the absolute property of her kin until marriage, whereupon she becomes the equally helpless dependent of her husband. ... Both before and after [marriage] she was merely a root-grubbing shell-gathering chattel, whose social assets were wiry arms, prehensile toes and a vagina (in Jebb and Haebich, 1992: 30).

Historian Russel Ward also argues that the practice of bartering Aboriginal women in return for other commodities, such as tobacco, liquor or food was widely practised. This particularly occurred in the situations where Aboriginal men lent women to white visitors (in Evans, 1975: 103).<sup>22</sup> The narrator describes this in the text showing that if Sam Geary gives a horse to an Aboriginal woman, her father, or her husband, this "would mean that he expected her to be sent to his camp" (C, 44).

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<sup>22</sup> Kaberry has claimed that the exchange of gifts at marriage was common in the native tradition in which "once the union is accepted, the man [potential husband] makes the customary gifts to the parents of the girl" such as "hair-belts, pearl-shells, spears, axes" and so forth (2004: 130-131).

In the Aboriginal society depicted in Prichard's novel, male power is performed over women's sexuality. Besides going through the first process of womanhood explained earlier where some men sing about her breasts, Coonardoo must also encounter another process of womanhood called 'pink-eye', an initiation ceremony. In this ceremony, some Aboriginal clans, Gnarler, Nuniewarra, and Britte- Britte, gather. Girls dance and sing in a long line naked around the fire for the whole night (C, 23). Fire, symbolising maleness in Aboriginal society, is central in the ritual (C, 23).

... the men sat round her in a ring and she was spread out on the ground before them. She remembered the time when the men had sat round singing to her breasts. Then in a flash of pain, she heard her own cry, shrill and eerie like the note of a bird (C, 23).<sup>23</sup>

The objectification of female partners in marriage ritual is obviously unveiled in these situations. It is obvious that women are made through the acts of men. In this situation, Coonardoo "[fulfils] her traditionally expected roles as daughter, wife and mother' as one of the most oppressive traditions for women beside 'multiple child- bearing' and 'polygamy' which are "located within the arena of sexuality" (Katrak, 2006: 11-14).

Another tradition related to women's sexuality is the practice of lending Aboriginal women's bodies to the invading whites. This is generally disapproved of by the white's society. The narrator remarks:

Her [Aboriginal girl's] husband, by way of hospitality, might lend her to distinguished stranger, or visitor, to the camp; but any children she might have would be her husband's children" (C, 21). The blacks, unenlightened by white people, do not associate the birth of children with any casual sex relationship (C, 21).

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<sup>23</sup> Williams and Jolly assert that "one became an adult woman through the agency of men in a ceremony that involved the opening of the vagina and ritual intercourse" (1992: 18).



In the narrative, Aboriginal women are lent to ‘strangers’, and in fact all strangers are non-Indigenous men. The word ‘unenlightened’ in the previous quotation arguably represents the prejudices of white people who consider this practice as uncivilised. There are at least two different perspectives about this custom. Firstly, Europeans see Aboriginal women as “the devalued chattels of their men” (Williams and Jolly, 1992: 18). When sexuality is “mystified as spirituality and religion and ritual [it will] provide rationale for women’s domination (Katrak, 2006, 11). However, A.W. Howitt claims that it shows women’s importance in their roles “as ambassadors to potentially hostile groups” (in Williams and Jolly, 18).<sup>24</sup> Coonardoo also functions as an ambassador between the settler and the land. Prichard constructs a scene when Warieda, being “anxious ... to save Hugh from the recklessness of his misery and the evil threatening” after his mother’s death, sends Coonardoo to accompany Hugh (C, 62-62). This leads to love-making between the two of them. At this point, nobody but Coonardoo can help Hugh in his sorrow. Sheridan also shares Howitt and Merlan’s view that “this is no simple identification of woman with nature but rather ... the Black woman is designated as a human mediator between the white man on the one hand and nature, as it is construed by Aboriginal culture, on the other” (1995: 144). This is what Katrak addresses as the arena of cultural tradition that controls female sexuality “particularly when women are expected to be the ‘guardians of tradition’ in anti-colonial struggles” (2006: 11). Yet, this diplomatic mission has been mistakenly read by settlers who from their own standards of proper sexual conduct regard it as akin to prostitution. Loomba quotes Sander Gilman’s view that “black women are constructed in terms of

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<sup>24</sup> Francesca Merlan calls this “sex as instrumentality, that is ‘...as available for use as a wider dimension of social relations’ ...” (in Williams and Jolly, 18)

animals ... [whose qualities] are those of the prostitute” (2002: 160). Bessie has an ambivalent position concerning this matter. On the one hand, she finally understands the different concept of Aboriginal people regarding the practice of lending their wives’ body to the invading whites, but on the other hand, still “[acquires] a faint respect for the man who did not attach much importance” to this practice (C, 21).

The common practice of polygamy in Aboriginal society depicted in the text can also be seen as a symbol of a strong male dominance. As stated earlier, Meenie and Coonardoo seem to accept their fate to be in a polygamous marriage. Williams and Jolly state that “polygyny was the rule” in Aboriginal society (1992: 16). Some benefits from this practice can be the reason why Aboriginal women prefer not to confront the tradition. In polygyny, they can share “the burden of pregnancy, child-rearing and food gathering” (Kaberry, 2004: 113). Sharing domestic jobs in the homestead is the only aspect between Meenie and Coonardoo that is repeatedly mentioned in the novel, but “the affection and understanding between them [is] deep and placid” (C, 50).

However, in the outback, not all settlers have the same perspective on polygamy. Sam in *Coonardoo* represents white men who believe that promoting monogamy is out of tune with nature, as living alone in the frontier too is out of tune with nature. It resists the natural process of existence. Nonetheless, by claiming that he “[emulates] the patriarchs”, Sam uses biblical verses to support his stance (C, 41). Sam says: “And in a hot country ... Monogamy’s alright for cold climates – perhaps. But when the climatic conditions approximate to the Biblical, well, I say, it’s all right to do as Solomon did, or Abraham, or David ...” (C, 41-42). The author’s voice is obvious in this quotation declaring that colonial values cannot

easily undermine the native's way of life. The European-minded settlers look down on white people who practise polygamy with gins (black women). Bessie despises Sam for being a "gin shepherd" and having "a family of half-castes swarmed about his verandas" (C, 30), and more particularly, for treating his "remarkable" gin, Sheba, like a mistress in a white man's household (C, 98). The last point is outside of European men's 'normal' behaviour in the outback. They treat their gins as no more than their sexual partners. They "just clear out and let 'em starve" (C, 98). Bessie tries hard not to set foot on Sam's station (C, 30), as her prejudice considers living with gins in the same house will downgrade her high position. This has been a consensus among white women in the frontier. Even Hugh passes on this value to his wife, Mollie: "You don't go to Nuniewarra [Sam's station], ..., at least white women don't" (C, 98). Even though Sheba was like a manager in Nuniewarra, charged with jobs like welcoming a guest, men in particular: "[showing] him to a guest room in which she kept clean sheets, a towel, soap and hair-brushes", [keeping] the store-room keys, [guarding] the whisky and tobacco when Sam was drunk" (C, 98), at most places, including in Wyaliba, she will not come into a house where there are white women. This situation shows elements of Bhabha's theory of mimicry showing that even if Aboriginal women become thoroughly immersed and 'expert' in what was expected of them, they would always be second class. Instead Sheba "had to go to the wood-heap [*kala miah*, or *uloo*, at Wyaliba] with the other blacks" (C, 99). Bessie and Mollie will not have Sheba sleep in the house. Sheba symbolises the majority of native women who encounter similar prejudice. Bessie also warns Hugh not to trust Sam, especially on the matter of Wyaliba, Coonardoo, and gins (C, 59). She does not want her son "to go mucking round with gins" (C, 58) like Sam does. She has shaped Hugh's

consciousness about “a compass of common sense, and cleanliness, moral and physical” since he is still a child (C, 39). For Bessie, Sam does not meet the standards of European behaviour.

### **Women’s Resistance in *Coonardoo***

Resistance in *Coonardoo* is not as developed as it is in *The Girl*. The careful representation of resistance by the indigenous female character might be because at the time of the novel was written and published, the idea of an indigenous uncommonly bold heroine would not be welcomed by the readers. It was hard for whites to contemplate the idea of a courageous Aboriginal woman in 1930s. Indeed, it is not easy to find prominent heroine figures in the historical books written by either non-Indigenous Australians or Indigenous Australians compared to those in the history of Indonesia. As mentioned previously, until the late of 20<sup>th</sup> century were Aboriginal people able to write their own histories. This preconception/proposition is also based on the reaction of the readers toward the novel which was not as positive as responses to *The Girl*.

In *Coonardoo*, I argue that no matter how hard the settlers try to destroy and reshape Aboriginal women’s identity these women will never entirely surrender it. Rather, Prichard represents her characters as making strategic adjustments to survive under white rule and retain their Aboriginal identity. In their conformity, they still show the power of their Indigenous tradition. As Prichard sees it, the black-white colonial relationship operates two ways, with station owners relying on Aboriginal skills and being drawn into Aboriginal liaisons while Aborigines submit to white ways but also resist complete assimilation. This recalls Bhabha’s idea of a discursive ambivalence in which although colonial subjects are being

dominated, they are not necessarily stripped of all power. Indeed, Bhabha makes the point that the colonisers never really want their Indigenous subjects to be exact replicas of them. Similarly, Aborigines do not simply receive and accept the colonial values but adapt them to their worldview (Bhabha, 2004; Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998).

Regarding both systems, her people's tradition and her master's power over her marriage, Coonardoo shows a subtle passive resistance. Firstly, during the initiation ceremony, Coonardoo reveals her reluctance to take part in the corroboree ritual. She is depicted as "scared", "awed and a little bit disturbed by it all" (C, 23). However, as she does not want girls from her Gnarler tribe to be considered weaker than the girls from Britte-Britte and Nuniewarra, she keeps her fear and complaints to herself. This can be seen as a sign of her willingness to conform to her tradition and expectations of her group. Secondly, Coonardoo's reaction toward her 'natural puberty' can be seen as 'subtle' or 'unconscious' protest toward the white's interference of Aboriginal tradition and toward Warieda's preference for white people's commodities in exchange for her body. Coonardoo takes advantage of the negotiation that happens between Bessie representing colonial and patriarchal power and Warieda representing patriarchal power. Bessie's decision to postpone Coonardoo's marriage affects the 'normal' life of the Aboriginal people. The marriageable Coonardoo is given unusual freedom, which is noticed from her 'roguish' behaviour. She makes use of her physical attractiveness to tempt "every man". She fully understands that nobody will dare to take her from Warieda or break Bessie's decision (C, 25). Yet, her 'mischievous' action causes some trouble. An Aboriginal man is eager to fight for Coonardoo. Also, Sam is keen to give Coonardoo's father "a rifle, blankets and tobacco" in order to have her sexually" (C, 26). Sam even sends his men to kidnap Coonardoo when his negotiation to take

her using Aboriginal customs fails. Although she has her moment of freedom, Coonardoo finds herself caught between colonial and patriarchal structures. She loses control over her body. No matter how hard Bessie tries to intervene in the Aboriginal law and how obedient Warieda is to her colonial authority she finally admits that a European standard in marriage does not work for Coonardoo (C, 24). Coonardoo's nature as an Aboriginal girl cannot be fully controlled with European ideals. This is the failure of settler intervention – they cannot control the land and indigenous people in the way they like.

Coonardoo is shown as mostly compliant regarding any oppression that she encounters. For instance, when Mollie's children are little, Coonardoo's time is spent "much more at the homestead than out on the run" (C, 110). Her jobs in the homestead are much more than those in Bessie's time. Mollie is different from Bessie, as she takes her white superiority rather too seriously and treats the Gnarler women like her "servants" (C, 86, 88). She even treats Coonardoo like a "slave" (C, 112) for "Coonardoo did everything [and] Mollie had grown up to depend on her for every little service" (C, 112). Coonardoo neglects her own babies and often cannot get rest with the other women in the camp because of her work-load (C, 110, 112). As with mBok who saves the Girl when the Bendoro's nephews steal money from her room, it is Meenie who can show her resistance verbally to Hugh about Mollie's treatment of Coonardoo (C, 112).

The traditional tasks Aboriginal women play in domestic and public spaces are quite similar to those practised by Javanese women living in a coastal village in Pramoedya's novel. Yet, when these subaltern people encounter new systems, European and colonial-aristocratic Javanese respectively, their space is limited to the domestic spheres – homestead and mansion. Through her facial expression,

Coonardoo shows her disapproval toward her domestic job in the homestead. She is depicted as happier in doing male work outside the homestead. When Hugh asks her to go out riding cattle:

Coonardoo's eyes lighted and filled with sunshine, as they used to long ago. She had become gaunt and silent through the long dry years. But she seemed happier out on the run ... That scowling shadow had left her face. She did not like the house, the room [Hugh] had given her; slept on the earth, unless it was very wet, out from the veranda, beside a small fire (C, 184).

At times, Coonardoo escapes into male roles, for example, when men in the station are out with cattle for weeks, she often "took [Hugh's] gun and shot pigeons or galahs for a meal" (C, 117). Also, when the food is scarce, she "rode out and brought in a cow with calf and milked her" (C, 74).

Even though Coonardoo has absorbed settler values, she sometimes shows her criticism. She is afforded some space for individual freedom by Bessie's tolerance of black culture although at the same time Coonardoo is ultimately restrained by Bessie's racism. For instance, Coonardoo mocks Jessica when the latter is crying helplessly because she refuses to be Hugh's wife, as living in the outback is tough. As we read in the novel: "'Wiah!' Coonardoo exclaimed to herself, ashamed because Jessica could be so stupid as to cry like that" (C, 53). Coonardoo's stance is similar to Bessie's who dislikes white women with poor spirit. By this, Coonardoo is represented as a person who has more inner strength. Even on one occasion, she bravely shows her resentment and distaste of Geary by using her 'tongue'.

"... Fix up some tucker for us [Geary and his friend]. We're stopping the night."

"No meat. No killer"

Coonardoo spoke flatly, with authority.

"... I'm not takin' orders from a blasted gin," Geary said. "You do as you're told, damn you" (C, 178).

Coonardoo answers back toward Geary's command. As Hugh's woman, she is in charge in the homestead.

Coonardoo's resistance toward white ways is also depicted in her polygamous marriage with Hugh. She becomes Hugh's de facto wife after Mollie decides to leave Wyaliba. Coonardoo no longer lives in the camp, as she is given a new space in the homestead, a room at the end of the veranda, a marginal position in the homestead (C, 139). Again, coming from a lower racial status, Coonardoo's space is located at the outer part of the house. Even though Hugh has tried hard to remain 'white' as his mother and white society expect, he cannot resist that in the country "the blacks are right" and "gins work out better" (C, 58, 97). However, his white prejudice is still unbroken, so he treats Coonardoo not as a proper woman or wife in Aboriginal ways. Being Hugh's woman, Coonardoo seems to expect that Hugh will treat her like her former husband had treated her. Being unaware of the white people's prejudice, she questions Hugh's inconsistent attitudes towards her. In her silence, "a sullen anger grew in Coonardoo's eyes because of it" (C, 140). Katrak asserts that 'silence' is one of the ways women use in resisting bodily oppressions (2006: 2). Using 'silence' can be as resistant as using 'tongue' as the powerful instrument of attack and defence (2006: 60-63). However, perhaps the reason why Prichard employs 'silence' to describe Coonardoo's subversive action is because she is unable to fully penetrate the minds of Aboriginal women, or know how to correctly express Coonardoo's resilience through Aboriginal language. As Susan Lever asserts, "as the novel progress, Coonardoo's speech in English is reduced to an obliging 'Ehm-mm' and the occasional 'Boys a comin' when the mail arrives" (2011: 62). Prichard often uses indirect speech and "it is only when talking



to Aborigines that Coonardoo can express herself” (2011: 62).

The intersection between Hugh’s morality and Coonardoo’s Aboriginality is perhaps the most obvious place where the two cultures clash. Vijay Mishra asserts that in Aboriginal discourse, “ownership without sex was not part of Coonardoo’s system” (1987: 7). However, Hugh’s colonial principle does not allow him to recognise the way Aborigine people treat sexuality. This explains why Coonardoo does not try to run away when she is seduced by Sam, although she could have done. She seems ‘unconsciously’ to preserve her Aboriginal way or to resist Hugh’s morality when she cries to herself, exclaiming: “Youie not want ‘m!” (C, 181). It also expresses her anger and resistance towards Hugh’s demand that she be loyal and submissive when he himself is not. For Coonardoo, Sam conforms to her Aboriginal way by giving her what she cannot get from Hugh: “Yet male to her female, she could not resist him. Her need of him is like as great as the dry earth’s for rain (C, 180). Mishra further points out that “this is clearly [not] the code of [White] Romance but [perfectly] legitimate and non-contradictory in Coonardoo’s [Aboriginal] discourse” (1987: 7). In this matter, Prichard shows her sympathy for the Aboriginal belief system:

... here in a country of endless horizons, limitless sky shells, to live within yourself was to decompose internally. You had to keep in the life flow of the country to survive. You had to be with it, and of it, in order to work, move as it did. After all what was this impulse of man to woman, woman to man, but the law of growth moving within them? How could a man stand still, sterilize himself in a land where drought and sterility were hell? Growth, the law of life, which brought beauty and joy in all the world about him? No wonder the blacks worshipped life, growth – sex – as the life source (C, 109).

Bird views the author’s sympathy towards Aboriginal people in the text as influenced by “her passionate opposition to racism, war and all forms of social injustice, her recognition and denunciation of the effects of colonisation on

Aboriginal cultures and her interest in issues to do with women's lives" (Bird, 2000: vii). In her foreword to *New Deal for the Aborigines*, Prichard states that "... the conditions in which remnants of the Aboriginal race are now living remain a matter for shame – and we do nothing about it. ... little has been done to give the original inhabitants something like a fair deal in their own land" (in Bird, 2000: 57). Bird further claims that Prichard "was one of the few Australians writers of her time to recognise and document ... both the significance of Aboriginal cultures and the savage exploitation of Aboriginal peoples by their colonisers" (xix-xx). Her criticism of colonial practices led her novel to be widely attacked at the time of its release. Prichard believed that "fiction should always be true to its sources" (ix). However, her non-Indigenous background and language boundary somehow restrict Prichard to show a more profound resistance from Aboriginal people.

Coonardoo's belief in her Aboriginal system shows her 'partial presence' in both colonial and local spheres. It also indirectly shows Hugh's 'partial presence', as he is emasculated by the country. Even though Coonardoo has been living with and learning the ways of the settlers, she cannot fully abandon her Aboriginality. Coonardoo even shows her innocence or unawareness about the consequence of the affair. When Hugh confronts her to tell the truth, Coonardoo, as usual, only murmurs "eeh-mm" with "no change in the steady quiet of her voice as [Hugh] had always known it" (C, 186). She is "unable to understand the madness with which Hughie had attacked her" (C, 186). Perhaps she understood that in Aboriginal society, when a woman has given herself to a man, she is not allowed to give her body to another man without her husband's consent. Yet, Hugh's refusal of her body plays a part in her incomprehension of Hugh's anger. Hugh's partial presence is seen when he 'unconsciously' mimics the way Aboriginal men punish their wives. It

is not the white man's way. Instead, "he might take her by the shoulders and shake her till her neck was early broken, or put his hands round her throat, threatening to strangle her" (C, 119). His reaction to Coonardoo causes confusion among the native men: "While it was understood a black should treat a gin who behaved badly like that, they could not understand Hugh doing the same sort of thing" (C, 186). Importantly, upon her return to Wyaliba, Coonardoo is described as still not being able to understand Hugh's attitude, even when she is dying. She keeps questioning "the ways of white men with [Aboriginal] women" (C, 204) and Hugh's madness and refusal to treat her like a 'normal' wife even though his eyes show his yearn (C, 205).

Nonetheless, resisting domination has some consequences. Some female characters in the novel are subjected to physical attacks after 'disobeying' colonial and local male-dominated tradition. As noted earlier, Coonardoo is dragged over the fire by Hugh after she breaks the 'undefined rule' that she is not supposed to give her body to Sam. Even though it might not be "as harshly as Hugh had done", other Aboriginal men will also punish their wives if found in Coonardoo's situation (C, 186). For example, upon finding his woman, Bardi with Crossley in the same night with that of Coonardoo and Sam, Chitali punishes her by holding her hair and "belabouring her with a stick" (C, 185). Hugh's harsher punishment of Coonardoo compared to that of Aboriginal men again recalls how colonialism creates a double burden for Aboriginal women. White prejudice prevents Hugh from giving Coonardoo what a wife/woman is supposed to have in Aboriginal customs. Yet, Coonardoo is still punished for doing something that she does not have in her 'marriage' to Hugh.

Katrak also argues that resistance will even lead to "severe penalties such as

social exclusion and exile from community” (2006: 58). In Coonardoo’s case, after being dragged over the fire, she is discarded and not allowed to come back to Wyaliba by Hugh. Despite the loyalty that she has given to the Watt’s family for her whole life, she is separated from her own people and the land in which she was born and where she spent her whole life. Wyaliba is her own place, her people’s place. These are the most severe punishments that she ever experiences.

In contrast to Pramodya’s the Girl, who can survive after being divorced and discarded from the mansion, Coonardoo’s body is depicted as “weakening and rotting away from her” (C, 204). She is no longer a “clean straight aboriginal woman”, as she cannot avoid prostitution once out of Wyaliba. She is no longer a well in the shadows but a “black pearl of a pearler’s crew, and before that she had been Esmeralda” (C, 204). Colonisation leaves Coonardoo’s body contaminated and ‘doomed’. Whilst Pramodya’s the Girl is given more hope with independence as a possibility, Coonardoo’s fate is doomed since Australia showed little sign of changing its Anglo-centric, racialised, discriminatory and gendered cultural traditions.

## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has argued that colonisation in Indonesia and Australia intensifies women's subordination. Despite their different historical and political backgrounds, Indonesian Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Australian Katharine Susannah Prichard have similarly used their writing to engage critically with the social and political situations in their respective societies. In *The Girl from the Coast* (1987) and *Coonardoo* (1929) they stage the effects of colonial, racial and gender ideologies on the lives of marginalised and oppressed individuals. Both stories were set in the first half of the twentieth century, a time when Indonesia and Australia were still operating under the impact of colonialism. Through the characters of the Girl and Coonardoo, Pramoedya and Prichard respectively hold up a lens to an awakening concern with subjugated people in the twentieth century in Indonesian and Australian societies. Both authors employ historical reality as the background to their work, telling the stories of two ordinary women and in part telling them through the characters' own viewpoints. In this way they give voice to the oppressed. Because of their inferior class position and race respectively, the Girl is finally abandoned, and Coonardoo is rejected and at the end left to fall to tragic ruin and death. Both characters occupy an inferior position in relation to men, although this operates differently in terms of class and race. The oppression of colonial systems occurs more emphatically in *Coonardoo* than in *The Girl*. Pramoedya's novel deals primarily with a class clash between the Javanese aristocrats and commoners during Dutch colonialism since colonialism tended to reinforce or shadow patriarchal domination in Javanese aristocratic society. At some points, both women show compliance but, as I have shown, in their own particular ways they

also challenge this domination.

I have argued that two dissimilar literary contexts can be brought into dialogue by applying a feminist-postcolonial theoretical frame to both novels. While there is a huge difference between the colonial histories of these countries as well as between the cultures of Javanese and Aborigines, patriarchal and colonial experiences resonate quite similarly. What drew me to these works was precisely the similarities they show up: the dynamics of colonial cultural politics in women's representation, the writers' political and stylistic orientations, as well as the novels' focus on female characters. I have explored how different situations in each text find expression in the lives of each female character and how the position of the two authors are linked but differently articulated. I have therefore considered historical aspects while simultaneously engaging feminist postcolonial theories to produce a systematic reading of the selected novels in the thesis. In particular, I have made a reference to theories of identity and resistance whereby not only are women's identities constructed by a male-dominated society that make them experience 'internalised exile' but which they also negotiate and often resist, however subtly they may do so. The tension between their old and new identities shows that identity is indeed a never-ending process of negotiation.

As I have shown, both the Girl and Coonardoo experience a double subjugation in their patriarchal and colonial societies. The traditional gender expectations of Javanese women living in coastal villages and Aboriginal women are quite similar. However, unlike the Girl who spends most of her time in the domestic sphere, except for a visit to her old village, Coonardoo and other Gnarler women still have spaces they can escape to, such as hunting small animals. In the aristocrat- colonial and white people's systems, the marginalisation of subaltern

women is even more obvious.

Another instance of the marginal position of women in both Javanese and Aborigine societies is in the area of sexuality. Both the Girl and Coonardoo experience child-marriage. They are forced to put away childish things and abruptly enter the adult world. They are expected to fulfil their traditional roles as daughters in this system by obeying their parents' decision – fathers in particular. Neither the Girl nor Coonardoo are involved in these marriage arrangements. Their passiveness indicates their lack of agency and their actions and bodies are at the service of others. The Girl's marriage is driven by economic, social and security benefits that derive from being the feudal lord's parents-in-law. In *Coonardoo*, however, the marriage is determined by tradition. Therefore, the reactions of the Girl and Coonardoo differ significantly.

Both Pramoedya and Prichard examine how marriage traditions, especially polygamous traditions can have particularly oppressive consequences. The Girl becomes the fourth de facto wife of the Bendoro and Coonardoo is the second wife of Warieda. Whilst Coonardoo's polygamous marriage is considered legal in Aboriginal tradition, the Girl's marriage is only ever a 'not quite' marriage. Coonardoo has a similar 'not quite' marriage when Hugh takes her as his woman. The difference is class prejudice in one case and racial prejudice in the other.

Both the Girl and Coonardoo perform their duty and new identity as the noble's and white man's 'wife' very well. Yet, no matter how thoroughly they are immersed and 'expert' in what is expected of them, they will always be considered second class. Whilst the Girl fully realises that it is her social position that makes the Bendoro treat her differently, Coonardoo seems to be unaware that it is her race

that prevents Hugh from treating her as his wife. I have argued that both authors introduce characters who mediate or broker relations between groups. MBok plays an important role in shaping the Girl's consciousness about her different identity as commoner and a first lady. Meenie and Bessie play similar roles in shaping Coonardoo's identity. Meenie only acts as the agent to prepare Coonardoo to enter an adult world in Aboriginal tradition. Bessie, in contrast, grooms Coonardoo to live in European ways for the sake of her son after she is dead. Bessie works very hard to shape Hugh's racial prejudice as well. This is the reason why there is a clash in Coonardoo's and Hugh's expectations, particularly on the matter of sexuality.

I have also argued that both authors emphasize that all three societies represented in the texts— Javanese, Aboriginal and European societies – objectify subaltern women as property. In the town, the marginalisation of women is even more obvious because men own the whole world, including women. Both novels interestingly show the rural space as one of relative freedom, albeit beset by poverty and patriarchy. However, while Pramoedya allows the town to be a site of potential personal escape, in *Coonardoo* the town only means alienation and degradation for the black woman. I have suggested that in integrating these asymmetrical property relations into their narratives, both authors point to a third mode of subordination that women experience under patriarchy. Quoting Katrak's concept about women's oppression in the form of cultural tradition, I have argued that women in the texts are trapped within their expected roles as daughters, wives, and mothers in both their traditions.

I also have explored an important aspect of identification processes that affect both characters. The Girl and Coonardoo experience identity transformation. Their



identities as subalterns – commoner and Aborigine respectively – shift into almost, but not quite ‘members’ of the dominant group. Both characters are taken from their ‘villages’ and put to work as sexual and domestic support for hegemonic males. The identity displacement changes them from free subjects into dependents. For instance, the Girl’s identity in the past is as a productive labourer for her parents, one who works heartily on the coast and then is shifted into a sort of suspended domestic labour for the Bendoro where her only jobs are to serve him obediently and to make him happy. Similarly, Prichard shows that prior to the coming of white people, Aboriginal people had their old way of living in the bush, hunting for animals, collecting raw materials, and gathering medicines from nature. Coonardoo and Gnarler people encounter displacement in a new system of exchange symbolised by the store, labour, clothes and other commodities. Their life becomes more dependent on the station. Coonardoo in particular has a greater burden, as she is obliged by Bessie to learn and practise European ways to dedicate her whole life to serve Hugh. Whilst the Girl is physically taken from her life in her coastal village to the town, Coonardoo remains physically on the land where she was born. In these two places, the Girl and Coonardoo have ambivalent identities and to some extent become alienated. In the end, the Girl leaves for another town and a possibly brighter future, but Coonardoo, having been sent away, finally returns to her birthplace to die. So Pramodya and Prichard are exploring how major change affects people – women especially. They show that major change distorts identities and consciousness of the female characters as well as alienates them, both in their old and new identities.

As I have shown, both authors suggest through their narratives that in the process of identity shift, both characters live by two ‘scripts’: natural socialisation

of the fishing village and Aboriginal tradition as well as the 'learned' role of a court lady and an 'Aboriginal European' woman. While absorbing and performing their new roles, their past identity as subaltern people continues to speak to them, since between past and new identity, to some degree, lead to resistance. As I outlined in chapter one, drawing on Stuart Hall, identity is a process about how we are positioned and how we position ourselves in the society (1990). The Girl promotes her people's values of egalitarianism and sustaining human values when she is taught the discriminatory and exploitative values of the noble class. Coonardoo likewise knows how to position herself in the two places. In the homestead, she will be silent, devoted and submissive, whilst in her *uloo*, she will be quite talkative and cheerful. Significantly, this split between worlds enables them to identify and question some aspects of power. I have pointed out that the Girl reveals greater agency than Coonardoo. The more the Girl learns of the injustices against her, the braver she is in expressing her opinion verbally. Coonardoo, however, both complies with and questions her master's world in her silence. However, as I argued in chapter one, drawing on Katrak's thinking, resistance from subaltern people will result in severe punishment (2006), and both authors considered here both show how mBok, the Girl and Coonardoo are punished for 'undermining' the dominant power.

I have argued in chapter three and four that the way Pramoedya and Prichard present these social occurrences is influenced by their left political leanings. Both authors share a view that literature and politics are permanently interconnected and they employ socialist realism as the literary mode of their writing. However, the different way the authors depict the resistance of the subjugated characters in the novel is determined by their position in the society. On the one hand, Pramoedya was the subject of the colonial oppression as a 'native', but in a historical sense

Prichard's background as a white writer was 'a part of the problem'. Their different positions consciously/unconsciously influence the way they deal with the colonial/postcolonial issue in their texts.

There are some reasons why the very depiction of resistance in Pramoedya's work and Indonesian context might be acceptable and possible. Firstly, Pramoedya writes about Javanese women as a Javanese. Pramoedya's criticism of some Javanese values in the novel is inspired by what he observes in his society and in the relationship between his mother and father (Toer, 1999). This story is also inspired by his maternal grandmother and R.A. Kartini.

On the other hand, Prichard writes about an Aboriginal woman from a white point of view. She depicts Aboriginal people mostly in their passiveness and silence. Even though takes up the role of spokesperson for Aboriginal rights (Bird, 2000: xxi), the difference in the culture and language inflects her position. Her white background limits Prichard's ability to champion the Aboriginal cause and to depict a resistant character. Furthermore, the book's suggestion of black-white sexual relations was controversial in that era and led the novel to be widely criticised. At the time of the novel being written or published, the idea of an uncommonly courageous Indigenous heroine would not have been positively welcomed by the readers in 1930s in Australia.

The significance of this study resides in the opportunities and insights it affords for a closer and richer relationship between Indonesia and Australia, two close neighbours with close political, cultural, commercial, environmental, security and people-to-people links. Bringing *The Girl* and *Coonardoo* into a comparative analysis within the framework of feminist-post-colonialism attempts to answer the the call for a broader focus for postcolonial studies, moving them

away from metropolitan societies and work written only in English (Niekerk, 2003). The findings of this study show that the texts can be brought into dialogue even though their historical and cultural backgrounds are different. This study also shows the importance of a local perspective in postcolonial studies. The comparative study between these two local perspectives is in part to show how Indonesian literature can be included in a wider framework as well as expand the scope of postcolonial studies from its pre-dominantly English-language focus. This study aims to encourage further research in comparative studies between Indonesian and Australian literature.

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